ANC

# OTHER WORLDS
## SCIENCE STORIES

JULY 1952

35¢

## THE SUN-SMITHS
*By Richard S. Shaver*

OTHER WORLDS SCIENCE STORIES

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# EDITORIAL

SELDOM does it happen that writing an editorial is as much fun as it is to write this one. There are many reasons: Perhaps one of them is that as we sit here, looking out of the window at Spring Creek flowing past the house only 150 feet away, it is a roaring, gushing, turbulent, boisterous torrent of *Spring*. Yes, Spring is in the air, and it sure feels good after six months without ever seeing the good earth beneath the Wisconsin snow. Another may be that we're chock full of health, and looking forward to the eventual complete disappearance of our paralysis. We're recovered enough now to be able to go after those absolutely terrific 20 in. trout the State has been so magnanimous in dumping into the creek *directly in front of our house*. That's enough to make any fisherman jump right into his hip boots with joy. We go down to the creek every day and watch them darting about, leaping in the air after the first Spring flies. Another reason may be that with this issue we are bringing OTHER WORLDS' readers the first of Richard S. Shaver's brand new literary efforts, this time written in the time-honored tradition of science fiction, and ready to stand up to any other writer's efforts on sheer merit. Shaver, it seems, was unable to adapt himself for some years to writing the type of fiction he is now turning out, but he has accomplished his aim. His recent yarn in IF was a

great boost to him, and with THE SUN SMITHS, beginning in this issue, he has hit a stride, which your editor considers *slow,* now that he's just read the *second* serial Shaver has turned in to him, to begin in our December issue . . . *or maybe our November!* Now *that's* the key to our delight in writing this editorial —the possibility of December being November!

Maybe you've guessed it? Yes, good old OTHER WORLDS is going monthly, "within three months" as we promised those wonderful readers who answered our request for subscriptions last March issue at $5.00 for 25 issues, or 20c an issue, which subscription can be renewed for life by the subscriber for the same rate. We asked for 2,000 such subscriptions. We didn't get that many, but we did get enough to go monthly—for the simple reason that we didn't have guts enough to depend solely on our readers, but went ahead on a real gamble, publishing a book by yours truly and Kenneth Arnold on Flying Saucers. It turned out to be far from a gamble, and we're proud to say that by the time the first invoices come in from the printer demanding payment for our new monthly magazine, we'll have the money to pay for them! It hasn't, and won't, be easy, but we think we'll slide by with no more than a tight fit. The important thing is that OTHER WORLDS has now achieved its editor's first big dream, the fact of monthly publication. Now we can

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**Malcolm Smith**

get to work on those other big dreams!

More dreams? Why you folks who were at the Cinvention in 1949 ought to remember some of them: top rates to writers (as high as Uncle Sam will allow); the biggest magazine in the business (remember those 320-page issues of *Amazing Stories?*); back cover paintings (the new FANTASTIC under the editorship of Howard Browne—bless him! —has beaten us to it, but hasn't forced us to abandon the idea.); and lots of special things. We've given the readers, the fans, a magazine they have begun to love, and we want to give them all the other things we've envisioned for the future. The experts say they are impossible. Ray Palmer does not recognize the experts. They will never have the floor as long as he can stand on his wobbly legs! So what if 320 pages does cost twice as much as 160 pages, and require twice as many readers? We're going to go out and get them! This chance to go monthly gives us the chance to "pour it on" now, and when you readers begin to see the stories I've got in the process of being prepared, and the ideas I've had lurking back in my mind, you'll provide those readers we need. And we've already begun to barge out in search of those readers we haven't reached before, because our "spread" isn't large enough. For instance, this issue has 20,000 more copies distributed, thus giving 20,000 more people a chance to discover we're alive. We're now sold throughout Canada (and how!). We're doing some advertising in various places. Even to the extent of giving radio a chance to talk for us. We're reaching a lot of people by mail we never reached before. In short, we're working hard. We're out to show the experts that even if prices are high today, enough satisfied people can make even the price of diamonds look reasonable in pigstys.

Speaking of pigs, we want to let you know that we're holding that $5.00 for 25 issues price open to any of our friends who still want to get in on the bandwagon for our monthly publication. It would hardly be fair to those who haven't known about our offer (or to us!) to let that offer lapse until everybody's had a chance to get their copies for 20c rather than the 35c newsstand price. Remember, that proposition goes for life, once you're on that special list of mine.

Speaking of that list, we want to set things straight. Anybody who subscribes to OW for any period at all, has a sort of "bank balance" with us. If, for instance (horrible thought) OW should fold, each and every subscriber would get a check for the unfullfilled balance of his subscription. We never assume that money not yet earned is ours. It belongs to the subscriber, in trust with us, until we either deliver the magazines he's paid for, or he gets his money back. Further, if for any

reason a subscriber should want to cancel his subscription, all he has to do is inform us of the fact, and the balance of his subscription money will be refunded. Ray Palmer has always held that rule—money in OW is safer than in a bank! And it's yours until we earn it. The same goes for that saucer book we're publishing. Refunds in full are always made to customers who aren't satisfied. Maybe you think that's a funny way to do business, but we figure what's worth selling is worth buying—and if you want to sell it back to us, we'll return your original favor with pleasure. Palmer thinks it's much more fun to stick his face in your door than his foot!

Speaking of fun, we wonder how many readers realize that's why we went into the business of publishing OTHER WORLDS? The basic idea of going into business is to make money. That's what they say. But something new has happened in this country in recent years, and we're afraid it's going to become even more of a problem—especially to the little guy (that's me). Was a day when you could start out, ala Horatio Alger, with a buck in your pocket and by dint of much industry, thrift, courage, initiative and cleverness, make a million. Today, if you succeed in making the million, you've made less than a quarter of that. So, the smart thing to do is to make a quarter of a million and GIVE the other three-quarters away!

That's where our plans for the future come in—we expect to make a lot of money on OW, and we know we can't keep it anyway, so we're going to give it back to the readers. Once we've made the few bucks necessary to live as we want to live (the simple life, including eating sunflower seed for health—go ahead and jump me, you chemistry boys!—is all we want); and the balance will go back into those 320 pages we (and H. L. Gold) talk about, the back cover paintings, and even gold paint on the trimmed edges, if there's no other way to spend the money. As for authors not making what they're worth, that has long been a sore point with us. And we sure don't think it is un-American to prefer to give the dough to writers, printers, paper manufacturers, ink manufacturers, metal firms (in short, the Americans themselves), than to the boys in Washington who insist on spending it for killing our friends all over the world! What we need is a few OW readers in the White House!

Speaking of friends all over the world, have you noticed that other magazines charge foreigners more for the magazine than they do the home folk? The reason is it costs more to ship the magazine to them. But the fact remains that it is no more expensive (material-wise and labor-wise) to ship a magazine from New York to the Virgin Islands than

(*Concluded on page* 144)

# The SUN-SMITHS

By Richard S. Shaver

The famed author of the Shavery Mystery returns to science fiction with a tremendous new novel!

**When something goes wrong with a Sun, it is the duty of the Spayderines to set it aright. Earth's sun had gone wrong ages ago, and its human birthright stolen from it by degenerates.**

*THE Guilds of Sol-Tyne (sun-smiths) astoppit on adjustment spectrum on Sol IX, by Imperial Edict from Emperon Maginadus Supreme of Valudin Tri-Planet Unitas, upheld by the Unicourt of Unattachit Race-states (to avoid open warfare though they understood not his action).*

*Publicate by Maginadus still further edicts condemning the nine planets of Sol IX to perpetual isolation and everlasting quarantine because of their sun's ill radiation, uncomprehens. Unfortunate peoples of Tellus, few surviving in terrible privation, inherited a scorched earth and a short and miserable life-span, which ended forever the power of the Mantic race group. The Menti branch of the Mantic group sent their own youthful Sol-Tyne Sub-guild, to dump trainon cargoes damping agents into Sol IX, to succour their race-relatives, and to recover the mighty science of the Mantic cities subterrane, the openings now sealed by the sun-fires, causing lava flows.*

*This defiance onviewed by Valudin War Patrols, a battle was fought. The United Fleets of the Elder Guilds joined their Menti Sub-guilds in the battle. The Guilds, not possessing military warcraft, were driven from the banned area. Their members scattered into flight and exile by the pursuant agents of Maginadus, the development of a technique of sun adjustment which had promised to open before the Mentic Race Tree the doors to vaster territories than their growth could ever people was astoppit. Thus the Valudin destroyed from before their path of power a future rival vast, at cost of losing for all-time a method of keeping beneficent suns-Valu-*

*din from turning into venomous radiators of ill.*

*From the Mantic Cabulare of the Yars.*

*(Elder Writings on Sol IX)*

*Eng. Trans. Palan Ahvanyi*

*Prince of Rurgen, Mervan.*

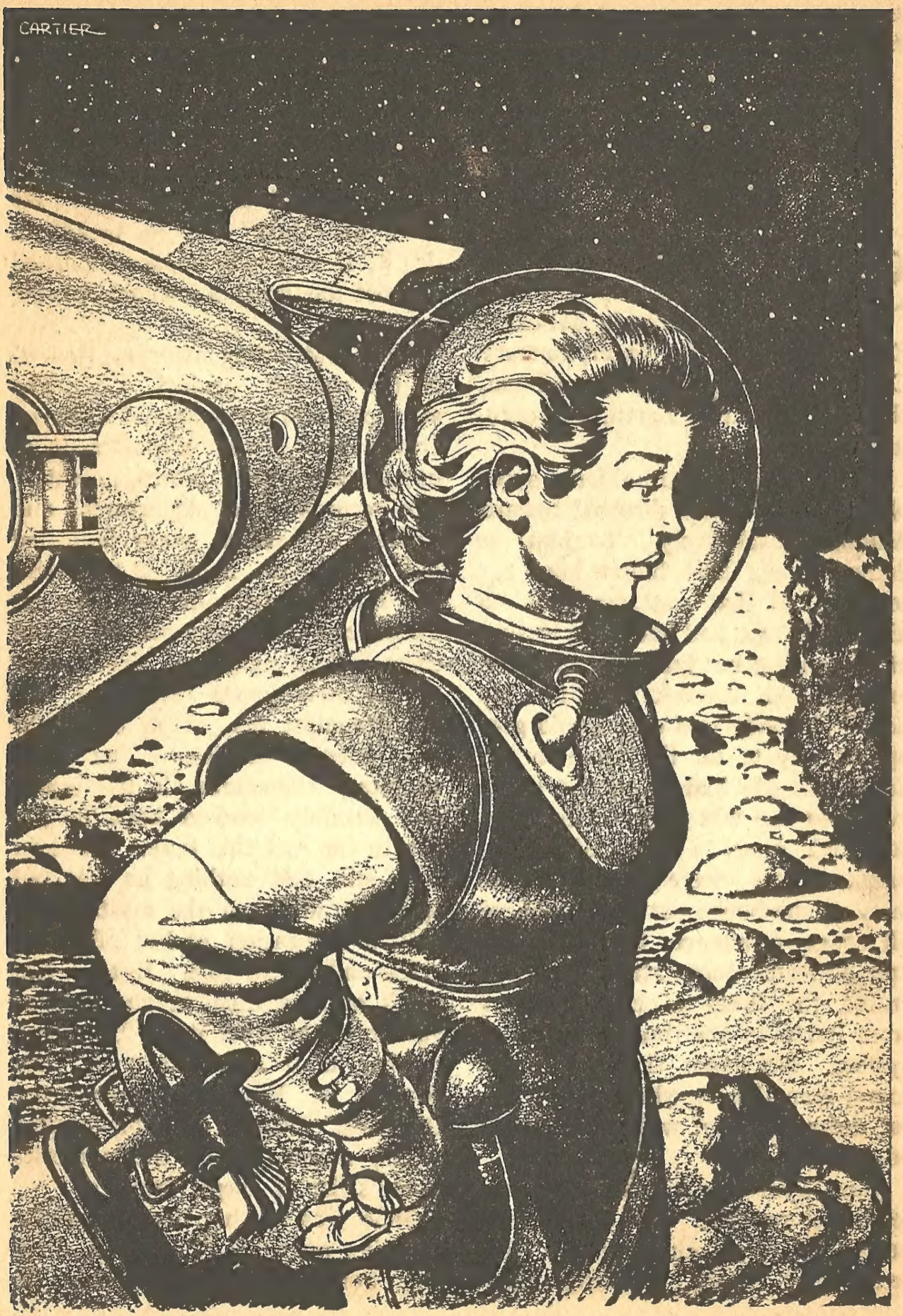
SEVEN thousand years and more after the above was written, in the year 2184 AD of the Earth calendar, the Interplanetary Commerce Court convened on Luna, the single moon of Earth, the morning of May 20.

The judge was an elderly sycophant, his worship directed toward Mammon exclusively. To him the defiant young lady before him represented all that was anathema to his creed. He had had the pleasure of sentencing her father to the prison planetoid, Karnak, for life. He hoped sincerely this case would give opportunity to do the same to the daughter. He had no doubt whatever that she was guilty of bringing to Earth many a cargo of contraband. There were multitudinous laws on the books set up to reserve all space commerce to those rich and powerful corporations who operated the fleets of cargo carriers from Earth to the rims of the solar system. No doubt there would be found several laws which the youthful defendant had willfully shattered.

June Tyne was a small, intensely feminine creature, with the ingenious charm of a school girl. Her fresh, rosy cheeks, sparkling dark blue eyes and innocence of expression had saved her from the law dogs a dozen times in the past. But not today. This dignitary was too old a dog to be impressed by beauty or to be moved by pity for the youth of the defendant. He knew his "duty" and he meant to do it, if it could be accomplished without too great a scandal for the press.

The prosecuting attorney reviewed the charges against her. The atomic-pile in her impounded sports-cruiser was of an illegal type of dangerously great power potential. The records of her departures and arrivals at various ports indicated she was in the habit of traversing the interplanetary lanes at speeds forbidden to all but official police ships. June sighed as she listened to the monotonous review of evidence against her. How could she have been so careless? The Interplanetary Commerce Control agents had certainly worked hard to pin her to the mat this time. However they still had nothing on her but speeding, which at the most meant only a revocation of her pilot's license and a stiff fine. But the last spark of hope died as she listened aghast to the final item: "A search of her craft disclosed some fifty pounds of Venusian narco-syrup, the most vicious of habit-forming drugs, number 1 on the narcotics squad's list of illegal imports."

June was on her feet instantly, shouting angrily: "That is a dirty lie! Someone is attempting to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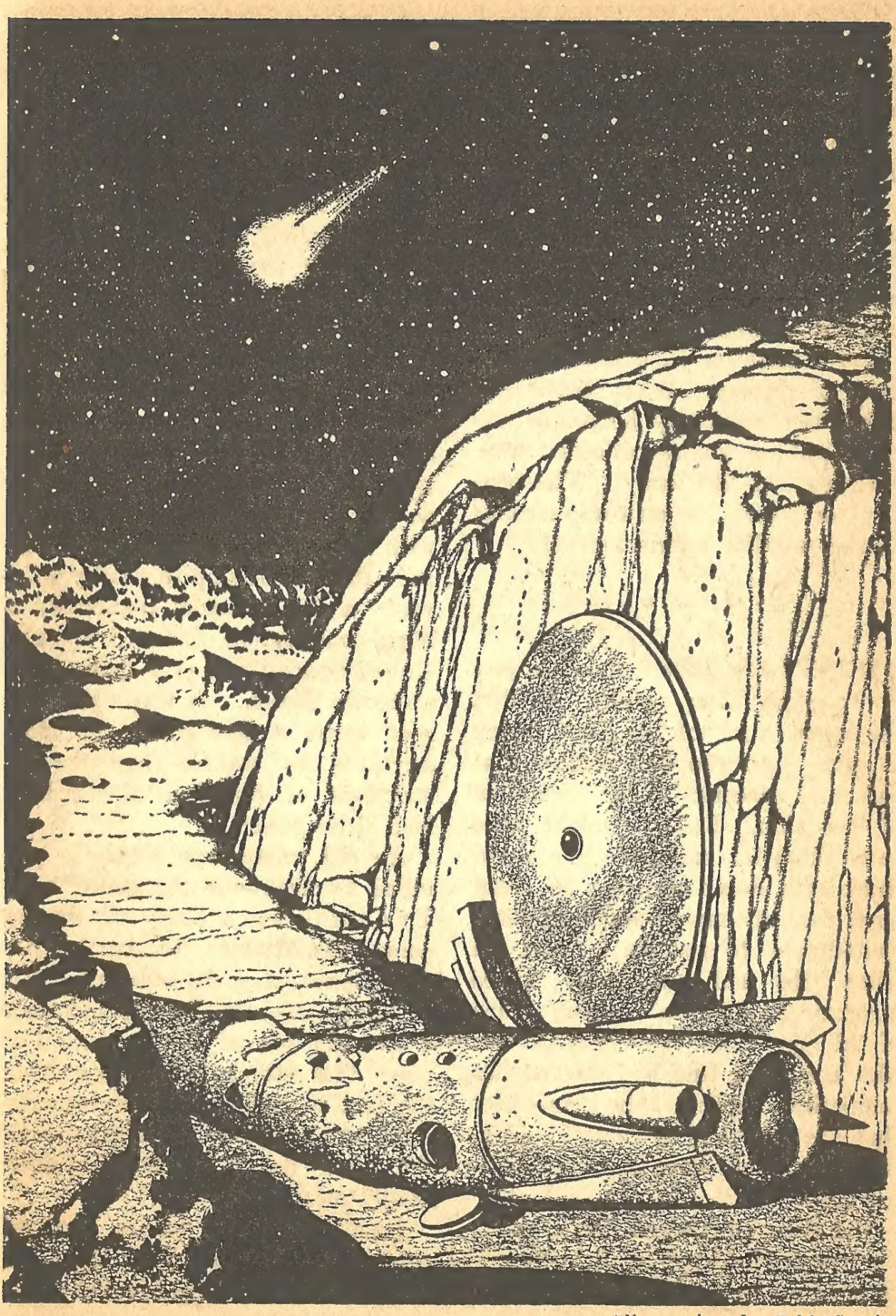

*Illustration by Edd Cartier*

frame me, Your Honor. I carried no contraband whatever!"

The judge pounded savagely with his gavel, glaring at her over the pouches that pendulumed his lack-luster eyes. As if at his command, two uniformed officers of the I.C.C. moved to her side, sat her down forcibly between them.

From there on June listened in a daze of dismay. What could she do? These seemingly honorable and clean looking young officers were swearing her life away! The penalty for conviction on the narcotics charge was life imprisonment!

* * *

PRISON life, June found, was just one day after another. At first she spent a lot of her time trying to guess just who had planted that parcel of narcotics in the insulation of her ship. But, it might have been there for months! She could think of a dozen people who could have done it, having arranged for a confederate to remove it later on when she had successfully passed inspection. And, of course, some of the agents for the big importers who knew her line had wanted her competition erased. She knew, now that she had time to think about it, that she should have expected nothing else.

The days lengthened into months, the months into two years, before a glimmer of light struck through the haze of anger and frustration, lightening her desperation with a glowing finger that pointed out to her the possibility of escape.

That possibility was the guard ship, a rather clumsy and old but powerful craft that made weekly trips, bringing supplies and relief guards. It took back, occasionally, prisoners whose time was up. It lay now, deserted, on its cradles inside the big dome that held the air for the prison. Karnak, sometimes called "The Rock", was an airless asteroid circling in a lazy orbit between Earth and Mars, and was no place to spend a vacation. Guards with two or three weeks free time rode the shuttle ship to nearby Midway, a big artificial planetoid, a huge construction financed by the United Space Lines as a fueling and exchange station. It was a pleasure spot where a man could get most anything he wanted and the restrictions of Mars or Earth laws held little power.

An old trusty was regularly detailed to clean out the guard ship. This trusty was a lively old woman named Ma Mullens. She carried her mops, pails, cans of soap and other paraphernalia into the ship and made a two-day job of the work. The hope that struck Jane arose from the fact that the aging scrubwoman was just about her own size, though the other details of her physique hardly matched.

June's planning was a sort of constant day-dream from there on, a day-dream which graduated slowly into a concrete plan of action. Every item in that plan received

hours of concentrated meditation as she tried to find a flaw that would trip her. The only tough part about the plan was to get herself to the spot where the old trusty acquired her mops and pails, a closet on the first floor. June's daily routine never included a trip to the first floor, for only guards and a few old trusties were allowed through the doors.

She finally solved the problem by volunteering for a mop squad detailed to a weekly clean-up of the upper floors of the big dome. She had at first planned to overpower the old trusty in the mop closet on the first floor, but changed her plan when she found her only opportunity would be at the time the old woman left her cell to go to the first floor. The women's wing of the prison was nearly empty, there being only some fifty female convicts.

Several weeks after June's entrance into the clean-up squad, she found herself alone outside the old woman's cell, and the time was right. She was due below in just ten minutes. There wasn't a guard in sight; their own female guard had left them at the head of the cell corridor to chin with the guard on duty at the entrance to the women's wing. Since the only exit was here, the woman saw no reason to watch the progress of the clean-up squad down the long corridors, empty of life as they were.

June, her heart hammering with the sudden need for action after two years of waiting, went into the trusty's open cell door with her hands hooked into feline claws. The old woman was putting on her heavy prison shoes. June clapped a hand over her mouth, hissed into her ear: "One sqawk and I'll throttle you, so help me!"

She gagged and bound her to the bunk with the bed sheets. Then she spent the ten minutes left her in an attempt to make herself look as much like the aged convict as possible. Flour on her hair, thin flour paste over her too vivid cheeks to give her the grey prison pallor—the worn denims they wore were already identical. The rest was posture, she knew, except for the voice. She had memorized carefully the speech habits of the scrubwoman trusty, wondering meanwhile what the woman had ever done to be sentenced here. Now she tried them out on her.

"Do you think I'll pass as you before those guards on the first floor?"

At hearing her own weary voice, the eyes of the bound woman widened, and she made futile gestures at her gag. June caught on. Her senses keyed to a high pitch, she knew the old woman wanted to help her. She slipped the gag out of the withered old jaws, her hands ready to shut off any outcry—but Ma Mullens whispered:

"I know what you're up to, don't think I don't, and my heart's with you, girl. Now when you go in, the guard always says: 'Oh, it's the

beautiful Miss Mullens again! Have you got a kiss for your sweetheart?' and I answer mostly with something like this: 'I may not be beautiful, you homely young pup, but I'll bet I've got twice the brains of those trollops you meet on Midway.' Then he laughs and opens the door. But when I don't feel good, I just grumble at him: 'Ah, open the door, screw.' Or I say: 'It's a bad enough morning for me without any of your dim wit to louse it up.' "

June bent and gravely kissed the poor old thing on the cheek. "But won't he see my health is improved? Won't he notice I'm not old?"

"You just bend over a little and rub your back—my rheumatism bothers me mornings—and keep your face turned away. 'It's a bad enough morning without looking at your homely face to make it worse . . . ' ought to keep his eyes where they belong. Good luck to you, daughter, and I wish I could go along."

June set off on her journey. The first hazard had proved imaginary; she had had only to approach the old convict to get all of her help in the attempt. She couldn't turn back now. If she missed this chance, another might never come her way. She passed by the male guard at the entrance of the women's wing without challenge. The door was open; he leaned against it deep in conversation with the bosomy matron in charge of the clean-up squad. Down and down led the iron stairs, and with each step her nerves got worse. But at the bottom, where the big double cage held her while the unseen guards looked her over, she was sure she was unmasked—it took so long before the inner grill clicked and slid aside. The trick of rubbing her back and turning her face away had saved her here, she knew. But now she had to pass the man at the Property desk, where the guards picked up theid keys. Behind him the arsenal of heat guns in racks on the walls nearly betrayed her, for her eyes lingered on the guns and her hate flamed alive in her as she wished for a chance to use one on the bunch who had framed her.

"Ah, Miss Mullens, our charming maid-of-all-work! What brings you so early? You haven't had your beauty sleep out, have you?"

June wondered if the big-lipped and heavy-shouldered individual behind the mocking voice thought he was giving out with clever persiflage, and longed to tell him what she thought of him. Which reminded her, and she rubbed her back, bending a little and averting her tell-tale face.

"It's a bad enough morning for me without looking at your ugly mug to make it worse!" she mumbled, waiting after she managed to get out the phrases the old woman had given her, with a certainty that her trembling lips must have betrayed her; for the bunch of keys she knew she was to receive did not flop on the counter in front of her.

"Oh, come on, give me a kiss and brighten my day, anyway! Why be so coy with your old sweetheart?"

June wondered how many years Ma Mullens had had to listen to this guy's maundering greeting without telling him off? She supposed the man really thought he was being kind to pretend he wanted to make love to her. She mumbled in her throat, saying nothing intelligible and rubbing her back far too vigorously, she knew; but could not seem to control her hand. Then abruptly the keys clanged on the dark wood of the counter bar. Her heart leaped as she snatched them and turned away, fighting in vain to keep the spring out of her step.

But where did they keep the mops? She couldn't go searching for the place! She could only hope the first floor was laid out like the others. If it wasn't she was sunk right here.

But from there on June found smooth sailing. No one was suspicious of an old trusty, even if she didn't look quite right. She was in territory where only the safe, quiet tread of guards and elderly trusties ever echoed. No one glanced at her once, let alone twice. The only time her breath even quickened was as she stepped through the open door of the guard ship and found a pair of guards taking a gulp from a bottle they slipped quickly out of sight as she came in. They seemed to be the ones out of place. Both of them guiltily left the ship and she deduced they had a habit of hiding a bottle somewhere on the vessel between trips to avoid being caught with liquor in the prison.

As soon as she had made sure the ship was empty, she slid the air-lock shut, screwed down the clamps with savage elation distorting her young face into a mask of grinning, unbearable suspense. If she could just get this thing past the dome air-lock . . . she knew she would have to crash the lock, that no flight was scheduled. She could not depend on the lock smashing into bits and the ship's nose remaining intact, that was improbable . . . but how else? She meant to try it, anyway! Even as she settled into the pilot's pneumatic cushions, she saw the answer before her on the control console. This ship had heat rays, as well as atomic shell cannons! A heat ray is a flexible weapon. She could flash it into the lock control chamber, where she knew there were three guards on duty. A little searing should soon give them the idea it would be best to open than to die of burns.

The next three seconds went by in slow motion. She knew time could get distorted, but never had she seen the phenomenon of physical speed-up in her own person so marked before. The ship glided up the ramp to the air-lock in the big dome-wall. Beyond glimmered the stars of deep space, the glimmer that meant freedom and life. She knew the ship was moving at a good clip, sixty or seventy mph up that ramp. The flames of her jets could

drive it no slower! Yet it seemed to creep. Her hands found her will holding them back as she moved the heat ray across the air-lock face and into the steel walls of the guard chamber where the lock controls lay. The steel began to glow red; the seconds ticked by. She moved the heat control slowly higher, higher, an agony of indecision in her mind. Too much, and they would be killed before they could open it. Too little, and they'd outwait her, give the guard rays on the roof of the prison behind her time to blast the guard ship with a shell. She knew such an attempt as hers must have been foreseen, some measures been taken . . . but whatever was all the delay about? Why didn't they do something? Why didn't somebody fire on the ship?

The steel walls glowed bright yellow, globules of molten metal began to drip down . . . she shifted the ray slightly to burn out a hole big enough to see inside, a mad idea of killing the guards inside, making a dash to the lock controls herself half-forming in her frantic thoughts. Then slowly, so slowly, the big valve began to slide aside. Even as she gunned the jets, felt the ship leap ahead, she heard the blast of an armor-piercer behind her, knew that she was spotted. That had been close!

She sighed a breath of infinite relief as the pressure of acceleration seized her, forced her deep into the pneumatic cushions, shut off her sight for several seconds. The momentary black-out over, she swung the heavy ship in a series of corkscrew turns, knowing that every gun the prison possessed would be firing at her as long as she was in range.

Thirty minutes later, she slacked the pounding, overheated jets, felt the lift and thrill of free fall flight. The circulation of her own blood throbbing in her ears was deafening. Trying hard to foresee where the pursuit would expect her to head, she swung the nose-scope in a slow circle, looking for the ships from the Midway I.C.C. station. She knew that by now half a hundred faster ships than this clumsy near-obsolete boat were splitting ether in a search for her jet's ion trail.

The scope screen above the control console told her the worst. Three dots strung along her back trail were coming up fast, and as she swung the scope back to her original course, saw six more coming ahead. She nosed over, was about to give the ship full throttle to nadir when she saw the red needle of the meteorite detector swing and center. Across the screen, dead ahead, almost in a collision course with her own newly chosen course, sped a huge battered sphere of nearly black rock. What had held her hand? Fortune was with her; she had almost smeared herself into a jelly on that wanderer of the void! Then came the burst of light into her mind, her own thought

crying: "Here! Here— is your way out! This thing is really traveling, and you're close enough! You're close enough . . . *maybe!*" June prayed in a tight little voice she was sure could not be her own. With blurred eyes she swung the clumsy guard ship into a parallel course. Already the big rock was getting smaller—it was really traveling! Despairingly she slammed on full throttle, and as acceleration tore the blood from her brain and clamped a smothering darkness down tight about her, a little movement of thought remained: "If that thing is traveling fast enough, it'll pull this job right out of their screens. They'll never catch it."

* * *

HOW long that blackout lasted, June Tyne never knew. When at last she came out of it, she found her fuel tanks empty and the guard ship nestled to the side of the huge meteorite. Anxiously she scanned the detector screens. There was no other metal nearby but the huge blot on the screens at the bottom that meant there was iron in the rock of the meteorite. She had not had time to check the fuel on her take-off—there would have been no chance to fill-up if she had discovered they were nearly empty anyway. Truth to tell, she had not been sure when she sat down in the pilot's seat whether this was a modern atomic-pile job, or one of the old type that used the fluid fission liquids for power.

June guessed the guard ship had been due for a re-fueling, which may have explained the lax guard. She had had just enough fuel to get her into a synchronized course with the speeding meteorite; its mass had done the rest. She wondered if the I.C.C. ships had lacked the speed to catch up with the wanderer or if they had just missed seeing her snuggled up to it. She dismissed all thought of her past two years with a gesture of one slim hand, noting grimly that her fingers still shook with the strain she had been through. Then she faced the future, and let the grim reality of what had happened to her sink in while she tried in vain to find some ray of good fortune in the prospect.

She was bound for nowhere, *out of the solar system* in a ship that at its best could not even *cross* the solar system in less than ten months! There was no fuel available to bring her back, and no way even to check her flight—no way that she knew to get off this careening rock bound for the vast darkness of outer space! Tears of frustration sprang to her eyes as she realized that her escape from recapture meant only that she was instead the prisoner of a far worse warden—hunger! Ahead of her was slow starvation, and cold, and emptiness. She buried her face in her hands, and her lips were salt as she sobbed: "What did I do to deserve this?"

JUNE Tyne's fighting will became a restless refusal to accept Fate's dictum to sit idly while she starved to death, speeding on and on into the infinite darkness. After some hours of the enforced idleness, she put on one of the space suits that hung in the air lock for emergency repair work. Stepping out on the pitted, airless black rock, she strolled about, admiring the blazing stars and wondering at her own feelings of elation and safety, in spite of facing a slow inevitable death.

Her first startling discovery confronted her as she leaped to the top of a steep pinnacle. She stood, and her suddenly numbed mind started counting: "One, two, three," as she struggled to accept the evidence of her own eyes.

Snugged down against the side of the pinnacle at her very feet was a long shape, gleaming in the starlight like stainless steel. Carefully she blanked her mind, stopped her racing heart by sheer will, slowed the bounding hope and speculation until she knew that whatever this thing meant, she was not going to let it hurt her. Then she jumped down upon the top of the smooth titanium steel beneath her feet, her metal soles clinking and slipping.

Her hope sank into a dull acceptance as she saw the rivets reinforcing the welded seams. The rough bead of the weld told her this ship was at least a century old. This little shell must have lain here on this ancient rock since . . .

She found the gaping air-lock and entered. The utter simplicity of the primitive control device fascinated her, but destroyed her last hope that she had found a means of escape. Only a madman would even try to take this thing across space—a madman or a pioneer who knew no better. She found the fuel gauge and her lips puckered in a soundless cry of despair at the reading. It was empty.

"What suicidal tendencies the first spacemen must have had!" murmured June to the empty barrel-length of the relic. She left the derelict, continued her stroll, determined to circumnavigate her world, however futile the project.

On rounding a peculiarly shaped shoulder of rough rock, she stood for minutes staring at the dull metal of a huge doorway before she realized that it actually was a door! A doorway, a ponderous ancient bulwark against the emptiness of space, a thing that screamed at her staggering reason that it was designed for but one purpose—to keep in air and to keep the vacuum of space out.

On this chunk of apparently untouched eternal slag careening through the sky . . . it was a dumbfounding discovery! June blinked, turned her back, gravely recited: "Eeny, meeny, miny, mo. If it's still there, in I go!"

She turned back quickly, expecting to see nothing but the ugly calcined rock surfaces.

But the thing *was* there, ten feet tall, in the center of its oval shape a knob glittering with amazing brilliance.

She tugged at the knob, turned it. A dull click within set off a series of subdued tickings. She could hear the bars sliding within the metal. Slowly the door moved, rolling over smoothly into a slot, like a record sliding into its cabinet. June was suddenly weak in the knees, though her weight was negligible. She sat down to regain her senses.

She sat there for long minutes gazing into the glowing interior revealed. Inside, a vast and enigmatic machine spun silently in glittering loneliness.

June Tyne of Earth moved into the glowing chamber with awe and fear of this terrific mystery shaking her limbs. But a strange, weirdly unacceptable hope rose slowly, like a sprouting redwood, small but mighty in potential, within her pounding breast.

* * *

JUNE entered the brazen doorway hesitantly, expecting anything —anything! She found a series of small rooms beyond the first huge chamber containing the machine. She did not examine these at once, but turned back to the central chamber where the huge enigma fashioned out of metal whirred forever, and decided it must be some kind of gyro, incredible as that was. A gyro to steer this huge chunk of rock . . . ?

Along the walls, inset, were many cabinets with transparent doors, and inside gleamed row on row of cylindrical jewel-like objects. Beneath these racks of strange colored jewels were a series of mechanisms, similarly inset in the wall, each in its own niche. Control knobs projected slightly, but she was too unsure of what might happen to touch any of them.

There were several shelves behind the transparent protective cabinet doors containing metal-backed books, and she opened one of these, finding the books full of unintelligible text and pictures too strange and terrible in their frightening implications of life beyond life, of world beyond world packed with organized intelligence not at all acceptable to a mind conditioned to think of intelligence as inhabiting only a human body.

Turning at last from this absorbing revelation of a culture and art far beyond any concept of extra-terrestrial life she had ever held, she moved through the rooms beyond, one by one. Each contained an oversize bed, looking as if it were designed for a giant, a huge chair or two, and walls similarly inset with enigmatic racks of gleaming jewels, as well as stacks of discs which she immediately recognized as some type of recording disc. In the last of these chambers June was

struck with fright, and gave a scream of amazement and horror. For, sprawled out on the huge bed lay the body of a man!

After seconds of taut suspense, June slowly forced herself to relax, and with a crawling revulsion touched the recumbent figure with the tips of her fingers. She could hear no sound of breathing, but her nose told her he could not have been long dead, for the temperature seemed near a normal 65 degrees F. in this strange underground place. At last she summoned her courage, and as the body was face downward, she turned it over, the better to examine it. The clothing was strange, seeming to her to smack of the archaic. People of Earth had not worn such clothing for hundreds of years.

He was quite tall, slender but well-muscled, though his hands were innocent of callouses. He did not look at all dead; she put her ear to his chest, then straightened quickly, for there was no heart-beat she could hear. She felt his pulse, and could not decide if there was or was not a movement beneath her fingers. She was entirely too overwrought to be sure.

It was perhaps her nervous condition which made her at length take a pin from her prison jacket, and with a kind of anger at fate presenting her with a companion, someone who could help her in this predicament—only to find him dead—she jabbed the pin savagely into the man's thigh.

The body jerked in protest, but the eyes did not open. The lips remained sealed, the death-like pallor remained the same.

In the weakness of hunger and defeat and with a complete loss of initiative, June Tyne sank to her knees by the side of the huge bed, burying her face in her arms and sobbing aloud. As she recovered from the fit of despair, she moved her arm, which had been pressing against a projection at the side of the bed frame. Her eyes drifted to this projection, a lever sliding in a slot, and in the sad idleness of her mind, her fingers tugged at it, toyed with it, until quite unexpectedly the lever slid along the slot. A sudden hiss startled her.

She sprang backward until the wall cabinets stopped her retreat; for from a dozen invisible openings about the bed a green-yellow mist hissed out, concealing the body and the bed in a cloud of vapor. With her hands over her face, terrified by the whole inexplicable incident, she watched through her fingers this mist envelop and conceal the figure, drift outward, wetting the walls and herself with a fine moisture. As the hissing ejection ceased, the mist settled, slowly dissipated, the moisture evaporated, the chamber was again silent and empty of everything but herself and the frightening corpse.

She noticed first an invigorating warmth steal through her veins, as

if she had been drinking. This increased; her head began to whirl in a giddy, drunken exhilaration. Then her eyes told her the fingers of the corpse had moved, gropingly! Scream after scream rang from her throat as she watched the thing rise incredibly, stiffly; watched the dead face turn toward her, the eyes blinking slowly, again and again, like the eyes of an automaton, the movements of the eyelids far too slow and visible.

As she stopped screaming to catch her breath, she heard the sitting corpse muttering: "Wha-what's happening, anyway? Turn off that steam whistle . . . "

A rush of sweet relief swept her at the sound of the human, warm voice. However stumbling the tongue, however strange the accent, the "thing" was speaking English! June suddenly came out of her fright and moved toward the "corpse" with hope a warm spring inside her, found herself saying: "Oh, what a scare you gave me! I thought you were dead!"

The man shook his dark, ruffled hair, passed a hand over his forehead weakly. "Sister, you might be right for all I know! I've been expecting it long enough. But give out, will you? Who are you? What's been going on while I slept?"

The expressions, the accent, everything about him was incredibly archaic to June, and she sensed in him another mystery as great as the strange chamber within the comet. But she sat down on the edge of the huge chair, and explained hesitantly, wondering just what she could say that would prove pertinent.

"I'm June Tyne, and I trailed this rock with a borrowed jet until my fuel ran out. The acceleration knocked me out. When I came out of it, my craft had settled down on the rock and I was out of fuel. I expected to starve to death, but I found the doorway and wandered in here."

The man eyed her. She could see the wakening wits of him, the keenness of his eyes increasing, and a little tug at her heart told her she liked this man. He grinned at her sudden smile, and ran his hand over his face again.

"That's a remarkably incomplete account of the events that led you to this old cometram, isn't it? Do you know what this thing really is?"

June shook her head, puzzled.

The man sat on the edge of the bed, stretching first one leg and then the other, as if he found his stiffness remarkably painful. His face took on a brooding look of withdrawal. Suddenly he gave her a sharp glance. "What is the date, Miss Tyne?" he asked.

"Don't you know? This is January 18, 2184."

His mouth opened in a gasp. His whole figure sagged as if sudden weariness had possessed him. "My God, no! I've slept here for over two hundred years? Surely you're

joking!"

It was June's turn to gasp. The strange clothes he wore, his unfamiliar turns of speech, his death-like trance when she found him, all confirmed his words. Minutes ticked by as they sat frozen, staring at each other. Then June straightened, leaned back, crossed her legs. The "young" man made a visible effort to relax, too. He stood up, tugged open his collar, glanced into the mirror that glistened still with traces of the green mist. Then he took a cigarette from his pocket, lit it, and after a second threw it on the floor and stepped on it. He smiled wryly at June.

"That's item number one in substantiation of your claim that this is 2184. Those cigarettes shouldn't be too stale to smoke. Still, in two hundred years, how is it they have not rotted entirely away?"

"How about the bed fabrics, the hangings?" mused June. "This place must be sterile, empty of all moulds and fungi, probably of microbes of any kind. It has all been untouched by time, and might be of an antiquity beyond our comprehension."

"It is that! A fact I happen to understand very well," agreed the strange awakened sleeper.

June eyed him doubtfully. "Please," she pleaded, "tell me about yourself. Your name, for instance, and how you came to be sleeping here. It might help me to understand, instead of quietly going crazy trying to think it all out for myself."

"I will!" He touseled his hair, sat down, lit another cigarette absently, only to grind it out angrily on the metal table top. "My name is Agar. William Agar. But my schoolmates dubbed me "Gates Agar", and the name stuck with me ever after, for years . . . how many years?" His voice trailed off, and he shook himself. "I was born on Earth, in the good old U.S.A., in Boston, Mass. In the year 1935 . . . "

"It's the United States of the World, now . . . " put in June, but he seemed not to hear. He was talking retrospectively, as if to himself more than to her . . .

* * *

EVEN as a boy, "Gates" Agar was tall for his age. As he lengthened into manhood, he also broadened into extraordinary strength. But his physical superiority never affected his humble attitude toward life in general and toward mankind in particular.

Oddly enough, it was this same humble attitude that led to his first defeats in his attempt to storm the ramparts of "learning". Gates stood in great awe of the hoary ages of man's slow accumulation of wisdom, and consequently was impatient with the somewhat slurred presentation of man's past achievements he encountered when he reached the

University. Gates had a very inquisitive and logical mind, and though he did not know it as yet, was extremely brilliant. He was too humble to be yet aware of his own brilliance, and the average pedagogue was not blind to his own shortcomings when face to face with Gates' handsome, disconcerting countenance, so open and honest and so deeply inquiring. This—as Gates from day to day unleashed his attack of queries and unconsciously caustic comment upon the Professors' sketchy outlines of history, or archaeology, or later, astronomy—led to an embarrassment of his teachers that Gates was unaware occurred. But everyone else was very much awake to the fact that Gates daily led his mentors into traps from which their store of wisdom proved inadequate to extricate themselves. After a time, Gates himself became conscious that these supposed teachers were inadequate for his purposes.

From this he moved to a personal examination of the theoretical base of their teachings, of the whole flimsy fabric of pedagogy. Gates Agar came by such steps to his first great disillusionment, the realization that the University had nothing to offer him that he couldn't acquire much better alone.

Perhaps it was the slant given his thinking by his unholy nickname, perhaps not, but Gates Agar did not yet give up the Universities. Instead he switched his courses and majored in astronomy.

However, as he continued to quiz his various mentors on the numerous obvious contradictions remnant from an ignorant past still blocking the paths of logic through his texts, as his slightly sarcastic voice kept asking why some less childish interpretation of existing data was not presented, he found that these pundits also were woefully lacking not only in true learning, but did not even possess the ability to reason honestly.

So Gates Agar came to spend more and more time looking at the twinkling points in the night sky, and his thoughts as he gazed were highly skeptical.

He continued to unleash his highly developed inquisitorial powers day by day upon the poorly defended ramparts of accepted "fact", and became known among the harrassed professors as the "nemesis". As the term drew to a close he found himself the target of faculty ostracism, and during the last semester he was unable to elicit a civil word from any instructor.

He did not blame them in his heart. But he did blame their blind minds, and the pedagogical system that had produced them; their inability to dissolve for him a single one of the many gulfs between "things as they are" and "things as they are said to be."

Gates was a brilliant student, far too intelligent for the average teacher's mind. They couldn't

flunk him, but they could freeze him out. He did not return for more.

He turned his mind instead toward making money. In one short year he hammered out three sensational novels. Almost overnight his work became the unholy bible for the majority of undergraduates in the colleges and universities of the English speaking countries of Earth. In them he pointed the ludicrous discrepancies of logic in the theoretical bases upon which pedagogy stood with its hooded torch extended to mislead all who sought an education. Overnight, the pompous pretenders of the collegiate Godhood found themselves the most laughed at people in the world. His books were endlessly amusing to every person who could both think and read at the same time.

With the royalties from his books, Agar turned to further education for himself, humbly believing still in his youthful heart that somewhere on Earth there was a source of light which could banish for him a little of the darkness he saw enshrouding man.

Thus searching, he accidentally contacted three former cronies of his university days. They enlisted him in a plan to uncover a certain ruin in Brazil where rumor had it was the "Tomb of a God".

They had photos showing awesome fragments of rock which no orthodox archaeologist could accept or explain in terms of the "known" history of mankind. His vast curiosity thus awakened, Gates Agar financed an expedition with his almost insufficient remaining funds. The four comrades took off for the basin of the Rio Carari, with two women friends, and a battered old fishing schooner which they planned to navigate under Diesel auxiliary up the river, as far as its depth permitted. There they meant to strike inland through some of the most dreaded of Brazil's green hell, on a direct line for the unbelievable "tomb".

They arrived at last at the site, half sick with insect bites and heat and bad water. They began to remove the earth from about the buried base of tremendous fragments, fragments that to their eyes showed the hand of some inhuman master of the art of sculpture.

They uncovered an entry, ten feet below the surface. They entered, found the solid immutable masonry extending down and down, instead of a buried chamber, as they had expected. They followed this bore for some two miles, to where it entered the bed rock of the continent.

There, the chamber they sought opened at last before them in an inconceivable display . . .

What these irreverent and revolutionary young archaeologists found within that chamber completely confirmed their worst suspicions that all the things they had been taught about the past were, if

not false, at least stupidly interpreted into the narrow mold of conformity. What they found exploded every theory about the history of mankind their mentors had so laboriously constructed for them from the meager fragments of the past.

The chamber contained machinery beyond the abilities of modern man to even conceive, let alone construct. It also contained incontrovertible evidence that it had all been constructed by the hand of man! Man had not been an ape in the far past! Nor even an ignorant savage! He had been something far greater than he was at present!

Among the most interesting objects they carried away with them was a text, in a script tantalizingly familiar, yet one which defied their every attempt to translate. The words were almost recognizable, the letters themselves might have been formed by a hand familiar with modern letter forms and who wanted to create from those forms a personal code. Thus the title of the text, upon flexible metal sheets, read "Comet-ramen Cabularia".

The word *comet* was for a long time their one point of departure in their attempts to understand the meaning of the profuse diagrams and orbital charts, of star fields and impossibly complicated interlocking series of ovals, like chains of eggs tied in knots. But to Gates Agar, the text was the complete answer to a life-long quest—a quest for some source of wisdom he could respect and accept as honest and unbiased and wholly unstupid.

Some two years went by after their return, years spent by Gates in an attempt to unravel the mysteries of the unbelievable treasure trove of words and symbols from the vanished race who had built so wonderfully. The others of his party, after months of recuperation from illness, turned to attempts to capitalize on their find, only to discover that nothing they had brought back with them served to convince any of the "authorities" they were anything but amateur frauds, attempting to hoax the whole body of modern archaeological research. They found their "photos" looked upon as "clever fakes", their "metal objects" as similar "fakes", interesting but unacceptable! And nothing they had to say could convince anyone of the importance or the necessity of further expeditions to the subterranean chambers in the basin of the Rio Carari.

BUT Gates Agar bothered himself not at all with the portals behind which the blind "officials" of orthodox archaeology sheltered. He kept at his work, and finally there opened before his eyes the fascinating truth—the text he had *was a time table!* A time table that proved the correctness of his first leaping guess at the truth behind the chamber in the ancient rock. That truth —here was a grotto where had nestled the mightiest of all flying

things a star-roving creature from the vast void above!

That guess had been close. But this text, this *time-table* opened before him a vista of immensity of *human* achievement that he found difficult to grasp, let alone *accept as fact*. He did not accept it, but his curiosity, his dominant motivation, drove him half out of his mind with compulsion to prove for himself whether or not he had correctly interpreted the fantastic tome of diagrams, symbols, and brief lines of impossibly potent syllables.

If his work was not an infinitely ignorant compilation of error upon error, then this tome was not a book at all, but an extremely ancient handbook designed for the space traveler! That space travel of intelligent life forms took place out in the infinitudes of space, Agar automatically assumed. That it *had* taken place incalculable eons in the past and *would* take place in the equally distant future, followed in his logic. But that it still today took place in this impossible and fantastic way—a way that took his breath away because of the astounding implications—he simply could not accept. Yet here in his hand lay *the time table of the comets!*

So far as he could deduce, one could travel through the vast and empty reaches of space with complete disregard for astronautical studies, with no need for knowing the location or the names of the various blazing suns or their planetary systems. You consulted this book, first looking for the kind of life you wanted to visit. You referred to the index, where was listed the numerous kinds of intelligent life. Finding life forms similar to your own, you then consulted still another indice for their stage of development, and from that to the kinds of products available for purchase, or the opportunities they offered to an adventurous newcomer, seeking a home or work or merely looking for a more congenial social system than your own. All these were listed in exhaustive detail, and it had been these incomprehensible portions of his volume that had given Gates the worst time. From there you consulted the space charts to find your present location. At the bottom of this chart one found named and numbered "cometrams" which took one away from one's present location in space, their orbits intersecting at predetermined intervals where one stepped off onto the next, as one transfers from one street car to another. One could thus, by using only a small jet-type space plane, travel through the vast immensities of the void for century upon century — and each leg of the journey was described and the points of interest pointed out. One could get off a comet at Berenice' Hair, and visit some twelve inhabited planets before catching the returning comet as it swung back to one's starting point.

Gates longed for another human

mind with whom he could discuss this impossible thing, but he was far too experienced in the limitations of the ordinary human animal of his time to attempt to share his discovery. He nursed the *"Cometram Cabularia"* to his bosom nightly, as he dreamed of somehow reaching the first step of such a journey, of somehow setting his own feet upon one of those intersecting rings of light that stretched through the pages of his text, each ring representing the vast ellipse of a periodic comet, and each ring touching at one or more points another ring and another and another —on and on he journeyed in his dreams as had that eagle of the past, the builder of the ancient crypt wherein he had found the book.

As year followed year, Gates insinuated himself into the confidence of a lowly employee of the Observatory of X and was able to gain access to the records and the films of the observatory. Borrowing stealthily, he photostated the entire notes and pertinent texts and writings of the most able of the eminent astronomers of the world. With this data at his fingertips, he settled down to a painful procedure of comparison, seeking to learn: "did and do comets progress through space, returning always to their original starting points", as regularly as the commuters' special left each morning?

All he learned from these labors was that several comets do return inexplicably to the Earth from far journeys into space—*inexplicably* because during the years of their journey afar, the Earth itself moved onward in space many billions of miles. Yet the comets managed to find the Earth and pass nearby each time they returned! None of these eminent men made a gesture toward explaining how a comet managed to *find* a moving point in space after intervals of twenty to hundreds of years.

This fact gave Gates pause, until he leaped at last to the fantastic deduction that each of those seemingly flaming bodies of seemingly "accidental" wanderers contained some sort of mechanism fastening them to their routes as firmly as a track lain before a train; some sort of robot mind, perhaps, able to watch the moving lights of the stars and from them determine how to return again and again to the same moving bodies, though separated from each other by light-years.

All of this work was advanced astronomy. It was so advanced, Agar knew, that no Earth astronomer would even give it a second glance, unless forced to do so at the point of a gun.

ABOUT this time Gates, now a man of twenty-eight, his tall robust figure unwearied by years of exhausting toil, his youthful face still disconcertingly open and honest and humbly inquiring—found himself staring at a clipping sent

him by one of his friends of the jungle expedition. The clipping announced briefly that a rocket flight to Mars was scheduled to be attempted from Anisfield, Mass. on Feb. 8, 1960. The clipping stated that the men who had built the rocket calmly accepted the suicidal nature of their pioneer attempt, held forth no hopes to anyone of success, held no illusions as to there being life on Mars. They merely had built a rocket which they believed would take them free of Earth's gravity, and that they hoped and believed they would have sufficient remaining fuel for a voyage to Mars.

There were two points about the announcement that bothered Gates. First, the sort of sensational fanfare all such news had received in the past was absent, which led him to suspect it was a shot in the dark by some reporter who had accidentally heard about it. Two, Mars was not in conjunction until months later, hence they could not possibly be trying to reach Mars! He had no doubts that *something* was being attempted at Anisfield, Mass. but as an astronomer he knew quite well this item was erroneous.

Gates caught the first train available, changing in New York for a train to Massachusetts. He alighted at midnight at Anisfield, distinctly a whistle-stop. The place was deserted, and the town itself lay some ten minutes walk from the station, across a bridge beneath which burbled a small stream.

Gates, carrying in a brief case his *Cometram Cabularia* and several sheaves of paper on which he had plotted tentative routes through the stars that could be traversed in the span of a man's short life, walked up the road in the moonlight, alone, unannounced, expecting nothing but disappointment. He passed on through the town, which he learned from a sign contained but two hundred souls. His eyes led him unerringly toward a gleaming spire, a half-mile beyond the town. It could be anything, even a silo, but he knew from his hammering heart that it was a ship built for the conquest of the stars! By whom he did not know. Whether it was a good ship or a crazy abortion created by a bunch of cranks, he did not even care. If it would get him off the Earth and into the path of a comet, that was enough. In his complete absorption with the ancient text in his briefcase, his mind completely ignored those who had built the thing . . . ignored any thing but the fact that here under the moon was reared a ladder that could lead to the stars.

He crossed the stubbled oat-field, the moonlit expanse empty of other movement, and stood staring up at the slender needle, some two hundred feet of gleaming metal. He saw that it was designed after Knoedler's "Cavalier" (the rocket that when tested by the navy, had failed to return to Earth.

His breath burned in his throat, his hands trembled, his eyes felt like hot marbles in his head. He laid a hand upon the thin guide rail of the ladder leading up the side of the tall bulk. He mounted slowly, his feet whispering in the silent night. In the distance a cow lowed mournfully for her calf, a dog barked at the moon, a car's brakes squealed around a turn somewhere. He heard none of it, only mounted step by step like a man under a spell.

The inside he found dark as tar. The pencil flash from his pocket was little enough for the examination he must make. But he found that the pilot's compartment contained only a rather huge pneumatic cushioned chair-bed, and three control levers. It was a simple affair: there was only the trigger switch which started the rockets; the cut-off switch which stopped the flow of fuel to the combustion chambers; and three levers which controlled the vanes. He felt without looking there was little more. Without contacting the builders and betraying his purpose, he could not learn if it was actually ready for flight. He sat in the great softness of the pneumatic cushions, wondering if they planned to send one man alone, if they would let him be that man.

A blinding light suddenly speared at him, and an angry voice from the darkness barked: "What goes on here? Who in time are *you?* How'd you get past the guard?"

Startled, for on seeing no one he had assumed the rocket empty of life, his hand twitched on the starting switch, and quite abruptly the vast hand of acceleration shoved him deep into the cushions, wiped all thought from his mind, pressed his face into the slack, drooling mask of blackout.

WHEN that force released Gates from unconsciousness, his first thought was to peer at the source of the light that now lanced dimly toward him from the darkness. He saw that it was a powerful hand-flash that had fallen from the hand of the man who lay crumpled curiously against the steel compartment wall. Gates struggled out of the depths of the pilot seat only to soar weightlessly to the ceiling. Kicking himself downward, he shook the motionless form. The hand flash floated end over end, and he grasped it, bent its spent light upon the man. He was dead, his skull crushed by that first blast of violence, his body twisted impossibly where he had folded upon himself with the pressure. The floor was messy with dried blood.

Gates looked at the blood upon his hands, dropping the light. A nausea of self condemnation for his part in the pioneer builder's death swept him. He hung there in the air like a floating shadow of guilt, looking inward to his own soul and finding a conviction of superiority to others he recognized

as sinful. How could he have allowed his absorption in his own thoughts to blind him so to the rights and worth of others? With every remorse he began his search for some method of disposing of this corpse before it tainted the air supply. He found it in a disposal lock.

Hours later, after he had carefully studied every gadget and every square foot of surface, he decided he understood the rocket and the minds of its builders. He knew what it would do, and what it could not do. It would serve his purpose. He felt not so guilty as before, for he felt that it would never have served the purpose of the men who had planned a "trip to Mars".

Surely rediscovering the space routes of the ancient races as they skipped from comet to comet across the voids was worth the loss of this man's life and perhaps any number of others!

It was with a steady hand that Gates Agar sat down again and got out his preplotted time table for the comets depicted in his ancient guide book. He would have to halt this mass of ungovernable steel and ungaugeable velocity at a point in the heavens some thirty-three thousand miles away, at three o'clock in the afternoon of a day ten weeks distant, to attach its bulk there to a vast chunk of rock that would career past him at a speed some thirty times anything he computed this primitive coffin could possibly generate. It was hopeless! He would have to match the speed of the rock to attach himself to it, and that was a manifest impossibility!

With a sick heart and weary hands, he directed the unsteady course of his stolen fiery chariot toward the point indicated. The days passed, and he found his mind wandering, knew his air supply was going bad. He reasoned, too, that he did not know the actual properties of moving bodies in free space, didn't know his own speed, and could in no way rely on any of the instruments on this thing, as they hadn't been calibrated in actual space flight. He would have to go it blind!

He accepted the inevitability of his own death; he had been expecting that, anyway. But he wanted at least to see one of the Cometrams, set his eyes upon a rock that had been set in motion by the hands of those masters of the far past. He could die, then, knowing beyond doubt that such mighty creatures once existed . . . beings with powers enabling them to assemble a system of transportation across space so beyond modern human abilities.

Gates Agar calculated his speed and course whimsically, knowing it was sheer guess work, but still he made the attempt. Referring to his ancient charts, he expected to parallel No. 2c lxt, and at three o'clock, knowing his fuel was almost gone, he yet pulled the switch to give the rocket its fullest possible momentum, and blacked out again.

His first sight upon awakening was the glory of the blazing gases of the comet's tail all about him. He speculated almost idly on how the ancients had avoided being cremated by the fires, and realized that he felt no heat from those same fires. He watched the thing, noting that it was drawing away ahead almost idly, sleepily.

What awakened his dulling mind was the sight of the door in the side of the great rock, like a tiny gate in a loaf of black bread. At this unexpected confirmation of his work in translating the Cabularia of the Cometrams, he gave a gasp of incredulous relief. But that relief turned into slow despair, as the speeding rock began to diminish in size ahead. Too, its course was far from parallel; it was drawing to the side, He gave his unwieldy chariot full throttle again. The last of the fuel did not have force to pull him into unconsciousness, and he jockeyed the three vanes in his jet stream frantically as he attempted to coincide his course and velocity with the comet.

But all his efforts were in vain, and he broke down in uncontrolled sobs as the great rock grew steadily smaller and smaller and the fire of its tail died out around him.

To come so close to entering the vast web of the mighty civilization of outer space, to come so near an opportunity to meet the beings who had woven that net of intersecting orbits across the dark face of night only to fail by such a small margin—was unbearable.

* * *

GATES turned a face touched with the deep sorrow of that moment toward his silent companion, then shook himself and smiled whimsically.

"Ignorance can be so painful!" she murmured sympathetically.

"You know?" he asked, his eyes brightening at finding intelligent understanding.

She grinned a tense little grimace. "Sure. Once you're in the gravitational field, however slight, unless there are other forces acting on your craft, it will drag you along, eventually you'll catch up. All you had to do was wait, but you didn't know that."

Gates voice went on, hurriedly, trying to finish his account to date in order to hear her explanation of her presence. "I waited, all right. I sweated it out the hard way, not knowing the truth, that it had me. I'd hooked on, and didn't know it. I sat there, and my whole insides were bitter as gall with disappointment, knowing that in a few short weeks I'd be dead of starvation, if the bad air didn't kill me sooner."

June settled back, her hand caressing her chair's peculiarly patterned covering, her eyes bright on Gates' with excitement knowing now what this rock was!

"I wasn't experienced enough in

the astronautical problems involved to compute the fact, or else I was too tuckered to reason it out. I should have known that two bodies approaching each other so closely, even if at slightly variant speeds, with their courses so nearly identical, would remain attached by the rubber band of mutual gravitation. No matter how thin that band stretched, in the near weightless condition of matter in free space, I should have known it would remain unbreakable as a towing hawser.

"For an endless time the distance between the eternal comet and me in the first rocket from Earth widened. Then for days on end the distance remained the same, while my air got fouler and more unbreathable, and I dozed off into longer spells of black nothing. All this time I was chained in unbearable suspense, watching, watching, not realizing the inevitable result. Then, with heart-breaking slowness, the distance lessened!"

"The mass of the comet was so much greater," murmured June.

"The rocket began to turn end over end," went on Gates in a rush, "and it began to settle more and more rapidly. I still couldn't believe I'd won! I just sat there, half unconscious, waiting, like a dummy with an alarm clock inside him, waiting for the bump to set me free.

"It settled down light as a feather, at last. I dove headlong down the length of the two hundred foot rocket. I wrestled the suit of clumsy rubberoid over my legs, zipped it up with fingers that acted like stiff putty. I roared like a locomotive at a crossing as I opened the valves of the tank and the oxygen burned into my starved lungs. I'd beaten that black void! That endless dark monster out there reaching for me was powerless now! I felt a pride and a confidence such as a god must feel . . .

"I moved out from the useless rocket, falling down, bouncing clumsily, end over end . . . I got to that metal door! I recognized the dim inscriptions on it from things I had seen in the Cabularia.

"I got it open somehow, and that seemed to take hours, yet you know how easily it opens, really. I came into that glowing chamber of the huge gyro-pilot knowing that so far every link in my chain of deductions were sound links, and that those parts of my translations I had mistrusted were probably also correct. I slipped out of the space gear, and stood looking into that mirror there, disgusted with my own haggard face, my black-ringed eyes, the month-old stubble on my chin.

"I knew from my calculations the comet would not arrive at an exchange point for over two years. And then I saw it: I couldn't make the jump anyway. I had no fuel left!

"I went through all the chambers, puzzled over each gadget with com-

plete futility. Finally I put the space gear on and brought the few remaining food stores from the rocket. Rested, with a cup or two of coffee sparking me, I began to reason that the ancients could not possibly have squandered whole years just sitting aboard this thing waiting. I reasoned there must be something I hadn't learned about these comet trips, something they had devised, but were so used to they hadn't bothered mentioning it in the Cabularia. Commonplace to them, something so commonplace . . . but at first I couldn't even imagine what it could be.

"It must be something to make the passage of time bearable, perhaps even useful . . .

"Fired by a new guess, I leaped up to crack my head on the ceiling and fall back cussing. Then I really began to search. There was either a device for retarding metabolism, slowing up the body chemistry, or a device for completely suspending animation. No one would thus waste their years, no one who knew so much about the universe as they did. They hadn't constructed this titanic cometram system just to waste time traveling about.

"My search ended in a puzzled stare over those tiny spool jewels. I decided they were to be inserted in the gadget beneath their cabinet —there's one under each cabinet, and each one is different. I inserted one where it seemed to fit, tripped the switch and hoped it wouldn't be another infernal mystery . . . wait, I'll play the same spool; you may recognize the tune. It's a curious sample of the partial survival of such a simple thing as a tune over so many centuries."

Agar got up, went to a cabinet and put one of the tiny ruby spools into an opening in the curious asymetrical metallic thing beneath. It began to play a plaintive, weirdly familiar melody—and a voice began to sing:

*Lake of Egypt, little sea*
*Let me lavè myself in thee.*
*Let me join the drifting throng,*
*Let me glide, glide along,*
*On thy far Satyrian shore*
*Let me dream thy ancient lore*
*Let me meet thy dryads sweet*
*Let me in thy magic sleep.*

"Rock of Ages!" cried June, suddenly, surprised and intrigued. "And that thing is so old that all Egypt was a great lake, a part of the Mediterranean!"

Gates Agar grinned, delighted she recognized the melody, glimpsed the vast time elapsed and the human frailty of revel even then. "It's still corny," grinned Agar, and they laughed together like kids over their discovery that the ancient builders were made up of people who could enjoy a crooner, just as today.

"We're two centuries apart," laughed June, "yet we both know "Rock of Ages" when we hear it, even if it is the strangest English I ever heard."

"There's a strange persistence of

form and sound and meaning that's startling when you realize the elapsed time," explained Agar, turning serious. "It was the thing that made my work possible, and it's the very thing that blinds the teachers to the real past. They can't accept it because it's so much the same it's impossible."

"I think there is something else blinds them, Gates." June had turned serious, too. "There is a dark secret in the Earth. In my day a lot of people were worked up about some activity deep underground, something they tried to say was a menace, holding all Earth back . . . I couldn't understand."

"I have an inkling about that," Gates had turned aside to the ceiling-high racks of books, and he held up his hands in a comical gesture of utter defeat. "To get what I wanted from their books in the time left me was impossible. I had food but for a month. I had to find a way to live for two years, so I could watch the next link in the Cometram boom past on its eternal round. I had given up a dozen times, only to begin the search again, when I put my hand on this panel in the wall and behold—"

Gates put out his hand and slid aside a decorative wall panel, exposing an array of gleaming metal discs. He pulled one out, showed it to June. It was a metal rim about a transparent inner substance, and within the substance extremely minute pictures shone in vivid colors, very life-like . . . "Beautiful things," exclaimed June, "if they weren't so tiny you can't see what they are!"

"Now watch what happens when we insert one in the mechanism here under the panel—"

Into the center of the chamber leaped a great tigerish beast, and June screamed in startled fright. the thing looked solid as oak. The creature turned away into a background of fern fronds, and after it came a man-like form, but a man painted in imitation of an insect—or . . .

"Is it man got up to resemble an insect, or some insect that looks like a man?" asked June, watching the frighteningly perfect job of camouflage which gave the impression that here was a killer far more vicious and capable of destruction than the mighty tiger-beast it trailed.

Agar removed the record. "We're not interested in zoology just now, Miss Tyne, however fascinating these pictures of other-world life are to us. I'm just showing you how I found the secret I searched for." As he changed discs, he showed June the minute symbols at the center of each one, giving her a partial interpretation of each one. "The symbols explain the contents, but unfortunately many of them are in other tongues than the Mantic tongue I happened to study. I ran through the discs hoping for a hint. Everything I saw was useless to me, but all the time I was looking

right at the solution and not seeing it. Hours wore on as I watched, fascinating hours, but time I couldn't afford to waste. Each of these records is made up of scenes, actual living scenes, from the various worlds this cometary railway can take you to—but I just couldn't spend the time to exhaust the endless number of them.

"At length I tried another section of the wall, hoping to uncover a different cabinet of more pertinent records, something perhaps left to remind the thoughtless traveler of what he might be expected to know yet forget—as on our railways signs explain the dangers of standing on platforms or putting one's arm through the window grills.

"Every wall panel contains thousands of the discs. Each disc takes hours to unwind its pictorial revelations. I was cursed with a superfluity of information any man of Earth would have given an arm to get one glimpse at. It was like an ocean of ink to a man dying of thirst; what I was looking for was plain water, not education by the carload.

"I found no food, and this added to my certainty that the ancient travelers used some form of suspended animation. But if so, then why the records? It didn't add up!

"In the end I almost missed it entirely. You've seen it in some of the scenes I showed you, and you missed it, too. Did you notice how some of the most peculiarly fantastic sequences, where a person enters a dream world of impossible beauty, is prefaced by a scene where a person opens a wall cabinet and takes out a little vial. Like taking aspirin, or something!"

June sat up, cried: "I noticed that, but it didn't seem important. I didn't really think about it!"

"Well, next time you see that scene flash past, I'll stop it. There, there's one. Notice she is taking several capsules from the vial, putting them in her mouth. On the vial is a little symbol. In the projection it's quite plain, if you are looking for it."

"That's the same symbol on the wall panel over there." June pointed, and Agar laughed. "That is it, sharpie. It took me days to get the connection, then I opened the wall panel. It's the medicine cabinet! There are a number of weird-shaped and symboled vials inside. The Gods alone know what they may contain, I don't. But that symbol of the little dormant man-like figure and the tree of fruit above it represents a sleeper under the tree of dreams. It also represents the drug they used to induce the perfect catalepsy, their suspended animation. It isn't like sleep, however, as your mind remains receptive, partly awake, in a true dream-state."

Gates took out the slim vial, about ten inches tall. He showed her the tree bearing weird fruit on its graceful limbs, and the tiny

sleeping figure underneath. He tapped out four little green capsules. He held them out to June.

"They put you to sleep, girl. You have to take them, to survive here without food. The mechanism concealed beneath the bed and in the wall by the bed does the rest."

June took the little capsules, eyed them a bit doubtfully. "But, Gates, how do you wake up? If we both go to sleep, how are we going to wake up?"

Agar shook his head. "That I don't know, June."

"You finally took them in desperation, because you were running out of food?"

"Exactly. And I slept soundly for two hundred years! There isn't any conductor on this train to punch your ticket, we know."

June bit her finger nails, sank back in the big chair in deep thought. Agar squatted on the floor by her side, and went on, his voice weary with the long account: "But that isn't all. I'm not the same ignorant Earthman that went to sleep here. I may have lost two hundred years of time, but I've gained ten thousand years of wisdom. Here, I'll show you. Lie down!"

At June's sudden glance of alarm, he grinned. "You'll just have to trust me, because you're going to have to learn all about this thing to survive. And this is the quickest way. You have to go to sleep to learn it."

June still hesitated, eyeing him, then she flashed a mocking smile. "After all, Mr. Agar, I hardly know you," she murmured, and they both laughed at the incongruity of conventions in this weird place. June stretched out, in the same position she had found Gates such a short time ago.

"Just don't forget to wake me after a thousand years or so!" June warned, and added: "But most important of all, don't you fall asleep while I'm under. I have no confidence in your waking up in a reasonable time!"

She watched him take a rack of the scarlet jewels from the wall cabinet and insert them in a slot in the wall beside her. His hands were sure and unfumbling, yet she knew he hadn't yet eaten for two hundred years! Then he placed a stack of the discs in another little cabinet beside the bed. Suddenly, from the center of the metal hood over the bed a beam of soft green light flashed down, a delicately caressing vibration. She slipped the capsules into her mouth, a strange sensation of paralysis ran through her, she closed her eyes . . .

* * *

. . . and found herself in a garden, with a tall stranger speaking familiarly to her from the carved bench beside her. "Listen, fellow traveler, and I will give you from an ancient store many gems of thought . . ."

June listened, thinking he was

just a little smooth and self-satisfied, and wondering why he spoke her tongue, and nearly woke up when she realized he wasn't speaking any tongue she knew, but speaking inside her head in her own thought-forms, without real words.

The whole vivid scene about her was not vague, as in a dream, but she was *living* this strange exotic experience with her every sense keyed to a receptivity unusual even for her young body. She bent her attention again to the dark-browed handsome man beside her, newly aware that she was living in a way she had never lived before! And she saw inside the man's mind, and it was not a mind of any kind that she expected . . .

The hours passed as she walked in the garden with the fascinating teacher, drinking in his words, and presently they passed within a tall tower in the garden. There she found many weird instruments, some making music, some projecting fantastic pictures of things that had never been on Earth. She walked from one fascinating display to another, and at each one she picked up so much that had always before been to her unknowable. She learned the inner chemistry of plants, watching the chlorophyl drink up the sunlight and make their food; watched the flowers slow-growing their seeds, knowing as it happened the inner why of it all, watched the animals mate and battle and build their homes, and the animals were sometimes men! And after a time she watched the higher animals at their work and their play, and she knew they were far more than mankind as she knew them . . .

* * *

AS she came back to a waking state, she saw Agar bending his face close to hers, his eyes somehow very dear as he looked for her reaction to what she had experienced. She smiled with a new wisdom in her smile, and said: "My heart is open to you, sleeper, and I know what you think, as I knew what the figures in the dream were thinking."

"You learned? The trick of picking up thought? I hoped you would pick it up! It changes things to see the true thought behind a face. I have enjoyed your every whimsical curious speculation about me, little June. I like your thinking, and believe me, knowing people as these ancients knew them, you don't make mistakes about their character. You are aces with me, you renegade from the pokey."

"You even know about that?" June flushed, wondering what else he had seen in her mind. "It makes me feel naked . . . but the people in the dreams didn't seem to feel naked. They enjoyed each other so much!"

"Of course! Their life was a mental one. They lived with constant mental contact with each other, and it seems to me it made them

more honest, was a big factor in their greatness. Let's try to be like them, and not even be embarrassed at the things we see in each other's mind."

June fought down her embarrassment . . . "It will be a lot like being married, only more so . . . I hope I'm going to be able to like being mentally naked all the time. If I had known, you'd never have got me to sleep under that beam, you . . . you . . . But I like it! It doesn't really bother me; I just have to get used to it!"

"Exactly. We've got to learn to live with it, now that we've got it."

"And I learned so much . . . Gee, we can talk without saying a word! You know, I can see a lot of things in your mind I can't understand. Two hundred years of those records played while you slept . . . it must have been nearly everything in this cosmic library! You're a mental giant!"

"I'll help you catch up, June. I'll play for you the strictly important records, and delete the entertainment stacks. I had to take them as they come, higgledy-piggledy, the way some careless giant of the past left them. I know just what to give so you won't miss any essentials. After all, we've got all the time in the world . . . "

"That reminds me, Gates Agar! What a name they saddled on you . . . "

"Reminds you of what?"

"Reminds me when do we eat? We've been here hours and hours, and say! You haven't eaten in two hundred years! That ray must feed you while it plays records in your mind, or you'd be one dessicated mummy!"

Gates laughed. "We don't have to eat. They didn't. They just turn on the ray, take the pills, and live by proxy. Or live in a tri-dim movie, as it were. There's only one thing I haven't fathomed."

"If there's one thing you haven't learned in two hundred years of listening to the concentrated information they pour into you through those records, don't ask me the answer. I don't believe I'd know."

"I'm going to ask you, just the same. I haven't learned how they wake up on time to catch their stop. Where's the alarm clock—the porter that lets you know what time the train gets in? Where is the dingus they used to wake up by? We've got to find it before we go to sleep. We won't be as lucky again as I was having you bust out of Karnak and hang a skyhook on this old skyrattler."

June Tyne looked at him gloomily. "If we don't find that alarm clock we can't go to sleep; if we don't sleep we don't get the ray; if we don't get the ray we get hungry—then we get hungrier . . . Look, Rip Winkle, start looking, because I'm starved."

As if to answer her he moved to a great round shimmering surface set in the wall across from the bed. "I've wondered if this could-

n't be some kind of celestial clock. But if it is, I haven't been able to figure out the angles. Watch."

He pressed a stud, and upon the circle of shimmering mystery sprang out a series of elipses linked through each other. "I know this is a reproduction of the orbit of this comet and the others with which it connects. But what good is a projection of this meaningless picture?"

They sat watching the enigma, and little lights twinkled and gleamed along the curved lines, appearing and disappearing. Each orbit contained a red dot that moved not at all.

"The red dot seems to me to represent the comet itself. The green light, there, see it blink on in this orbit?—that's where we get off. But how do we know how to turn it on and be sure it wakes us? We can't wait to find out, and if it works, it doesn't work till the red light reaches the green one. They move so slowly you can't even see them move."

June moved up beside him, examining the thing. There was only one stud, and she had seen him press that to turn it on. Remembering some controls she had seen that worked two ways, she reached out and turned the stud round and round, like winding a watch. At the resulting action on the big dial, Gates gave a shout of acclaim. For a pointer had leaped out across the face of the weird clock, began to tick, tick around, like a second hand on a watch.

"Keep turning it! It moves the pointer—when that pointer reaches the green light, something ought to happen . . . "

Nearer and nearer the ticking, vibrating pointer came to the tiny blinking green light. As they touched and merged, a vast noise swept deafeningly through the chambers, and they both leaped back, startled in spite of the fact they had been expecting something unusual. With the noise the same steaming mist that had awakened Agar came jetting from the orifices in the walls. The mist stung their nostrils. Its invigorating stimulation made them half drunk, and they hugged each other and danced in jubilant discovery.

"That's the old brass-bound alarm, all right!" bellowed Agar, dancing June around the place, "I knew that must be it but I never thought that stud worked two ways. Simple things are the most difficult of all. You're a whiz, you little space pirate . . . "

"I'd seen that sort of control before, that's all," explained June, freeing herself and sinking to a seat on the too-high chair. "The reason it didn't work for you was simply that it wasn't set. I'm not sure we understand just how to set it, yet, but then we don't know exactly when to set it anyway."

"Beddy-bye, June-girl," murmured Agar, still under the influence of the terrific stimulant he had absorbed twice in a few hours.

She gave a horrified scream as she saw him pop a half-dozen of the capsules of sleep in his mouth. "You can't go to sleep yet. We're not sure that's how it works! We only think so!"

With a terrific effort of will Agar staggered to the dial in the wall, turned the pointer till it touched the red dot. He grimaced sleepily at June, his lips already stiff with the potent drug, "It follows the course of the comet, dopey, and when it gets where it's going, it goes off! Come on, grab your opium and let's go to dream land!"

Then he sagged in oblivion on the floor beneath the dial. June bent over him, tears in her eyes from relief, knowing he was right about the dial, but wishing he had not been so precipitous in his rush to go back to sleep. But she knew the tremendous lure of the vivid sensual experiences the ancient record mechanism could give. With an effort she lifted his shoulders, dragged him to the huge bed, levered his weight up and across its wide surface. Then she checked all the disc and spool-jewel mechanisms to make sure they were filled with the records. She wondered if he had selected her records as he had planned. He could have done it while she was asleep; he had had hours.

Stretching out beside him, she placed four of the capsules in her mouth, stretched luxuriously as the soft green beam beat down upon her with its infinite gift of bodily well-being.

The ancient comet sped on and on and the two exiles from Earth slept. The years swept by . . .

* * *

As June Tyne and Gates Agar lay sleeping, several things were going on, things designed by the ancient Menti race to render the time spent in travel no loss, but gain.

From the cabinets where Agar had carefully placed the discs and tiny jewel records, one by one the discs slid down from their slots into the augmentic device below, and were automatically projected upon the sleepers.

Though asleep, their dreams were vivid with a constant display of scenes and adventures—each one of which was arranged in order to add to the sum total of the sleepers' knowledge. As the weeks and months went by, their bodies lay dormant as trees in winter time, yet their brains were kept active by the energies given off by the projection rays of the instrument, active enough to live through and enjoy the recorded experiences and wisdom and the deepest thoughts of the long-gone builders. As the store of records ran their course, they learned not only the language, but the manners and customs and history of all the races who spoke the Mantic tongue and its numerous derivative tongues. To such an ex-

tent was this true that after being asleep but two months June was no longer a simple individual from a backward planet, but by mental experience now approached equality with the citizens of the vast and ancient empires of space.

When at last the great burring vibration of awakening alarm and the sprays of invigorating essences aroused their bodies, counteracting the drug of dormancy, it was not the same June Tyne and Gates Agar. It was instead two space travelers of immense experience, two who bore in their minds the equivalent of centuries of travel among advanced cultures, as well as the equivalent of centuries of experience as workmen and students, for the records taught not only arts and travels, but useful trades as well.

In their memories were stored ineradicably the uses and operation of a great number of the diverse ancient mechanisms, how to repair and service them, even how to construct many ingenious devices in use in those worlds from which the great race of the cometram had come. So that now they were no longer ignorant people of ordinary Earth-life experience, but two who had acquired in concentrated form the wisdom and the lore and the actual manual know-how of a vast age-long development of scientific techniques, the accumulated and condensed race-lore of a mighty and numerous people.

June looked up from her long but vivid dream-sleep, her first self-activated thought turning to Agar. She turned and looked at him beside her with the eyes of a woman who had traversed a universe, who had experienced endless life-times of joy and sorrow, of pain and frustration and the overcoming of the obstacles of life, who had looked into a thousand-thousand super-minds and acquired their best and noblest memory-lessons. She saw and understood now much that she had not been sensitive enough to grasp about this man before. She saw that he had been an extreme sensitive from birth, a man of extraordinary acumen born with inductive faculties immensely above the average of his kind. And she knew that in his sleep he had also acquired the same terrific store of wisdom from that mighty race so long vanished from this area of space. A well of thanksgiving sprang up in her waking heart that it was her good fortune to be beside this man who would inevitably become the mightiest human of all Earth, the greatest of his race and time.

Agar wakened slowly, coming from his life-like trance-dream of moving among the superior beings of a race beyond his former conceptions of "wise" and "able", and looked up into the affectionate eyes of a woman far beyond his former hopes in beauty and wisdom. She, here with him, caused a hope to spring in his heart that she would find him acceptable even with the

inevitable comparison of his lesser self with the mighty men of the vanished race who moved through the record projections.

She smiled a slow and deeply understanding smile, and her lips did not move as he heard in his mind: "I know what you think, and I am glad at heart that you think so humbly . . . so desirously. Can you hear me?"

Agar nodded and eased himself slowly to his feet. On the walls the great needle of the dial quivered upon the green symbol. He opened his mouth to speak: "We must act quickly! It is the exchange point. We can synthesize a little fuel from the stores in the lower chambers . . ." But he did not have to say it aloud, for she heard his thought before it reached his lips, and her answer sparkled across his mind like a line of firefly-glowing symbols . . .

"Yes, if we still plan to travel with the comets. But to where? It is better that we reconsider our former vague plans, and pick from your Cabularia the most congenial race and world, where people of our limited physical and mental capacities would be welcome. We know now more than we ever expected to know, but we still would be out of place among the great race itself, like children among giants. If we would advance up the ladder of life, we must first go where we fit . . ."

BUT decision was taken from their hands. A vibrant roar penetrated from above, a series of thumps upon the rock outside. Their minds reached out with their new abilities to look into the mind outside. They saw that one strange being had come to investigate their two ships which indicated passengers from an area of space from which none were allowed to come. They rose together as one, and stood before the mirror, settling right the traces of their long sleep. Both were surprised at the change in their appearances, the subtle difference of expression, the healthier glow of the skin, the keen awareness of the eyes. They were not at all the same dull half-alive faces that had peered back at them in those last desperate hours as they searched for the secrets they must learn to survive the long journey.

Also on their faces, and in their eyes and their thought as they looked at each other and their reflections in the mirror, was the same frightening presentiment. It arose from their deep sensing of the presence outside. That mind about to enter *was not human!* The thought movements of the creature were hidden, a meaningless jumble. That mind was wearing a mask, meaningless thought put on to disguise its inner intent! Both of them knew there could be only one reason for such a mental mask . . . and that reason not good!

The great metal door creaked slowly aside. From the airlock came the sudden breath of cold and the

quick rustle of movement . . . not a human footstep! They waited to meet the unseen creature, terribly aware that their hands contained no defensive weapon, that they were at the mercy of that quick slither and rustle bearing closer the hidden menace behind that mental mask!

They waited. The seconds ticked by like hours, and hope and fear mingled terribly as they moved forward from the sleep chamber to meet for the first time one of the creatures who dwelt now in this area of outer space. Where once the power of the Mantic groups had made all safe was now only chaos, they knew. This thing they moved to meet was a child of that chaos, and the only coherent thought they could extract from its mind was a hatred for the white and foolish sons of men!

(To be continued)


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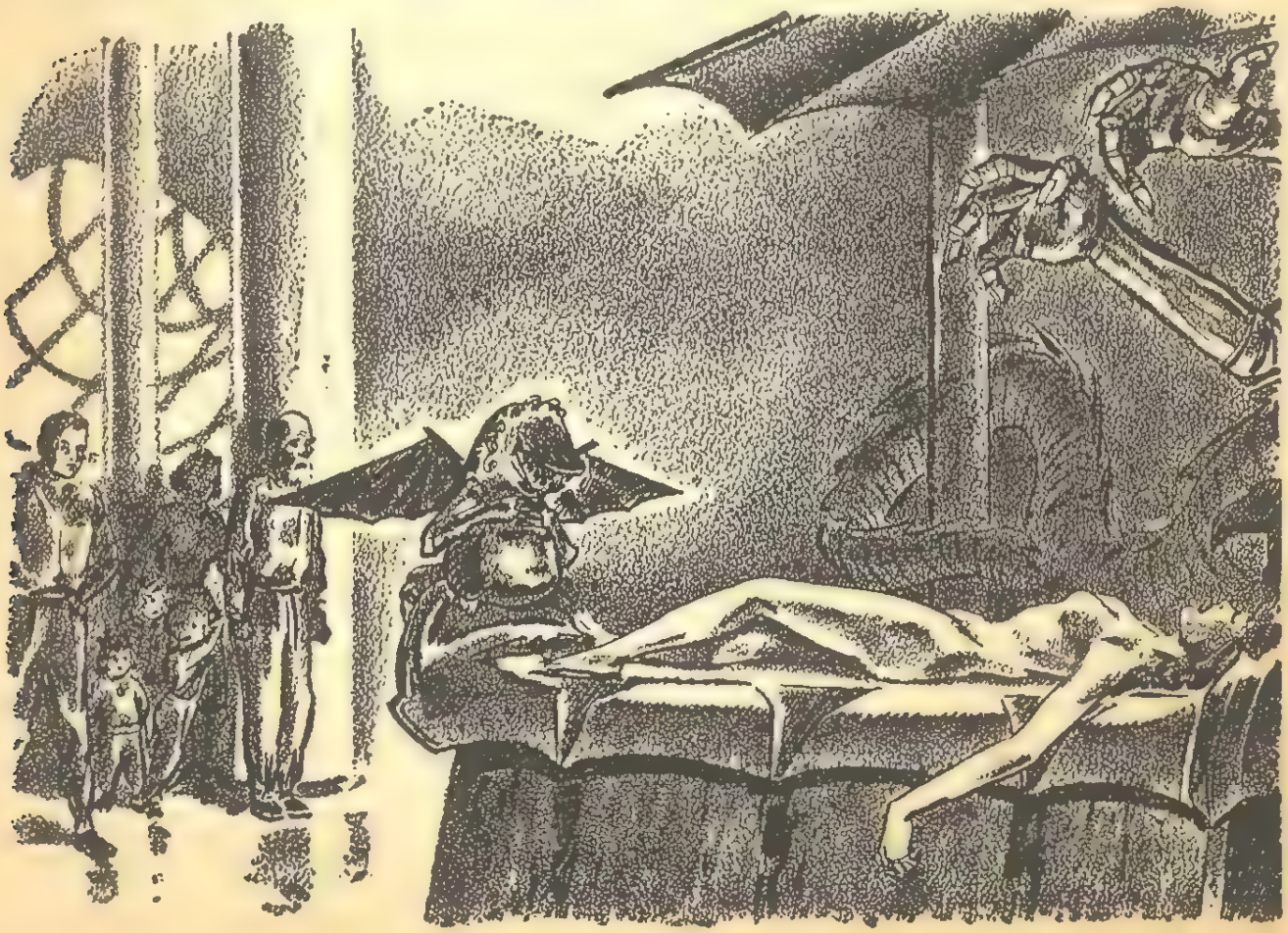
# The ULTIMATE DEATH

*By Howard Dare*

**When the Khri came to Earth, they assumed absolute mastery; they even brought death to the soul—and a ghastly god of nothing!**

JAMES Marlowe Goodman knew he was young, only thirty-five years of age, yet on this fateful night of the year 2147 A.D. he felt as old as the history of Man. As was always his habit when meditating, he paced the floor with long, slow strides, his grayish-blue eyes glittering, deep down inside, under jutting brows that appeared to bristle, like fine, steel wires. Tall, slightly stooped, with the hulking shoulders of a man who might have been a great athlete but had never had time to train for it, he now appeared to have succumbed to weariness. The withering effects of his ceaseless labors were in greatest evi-



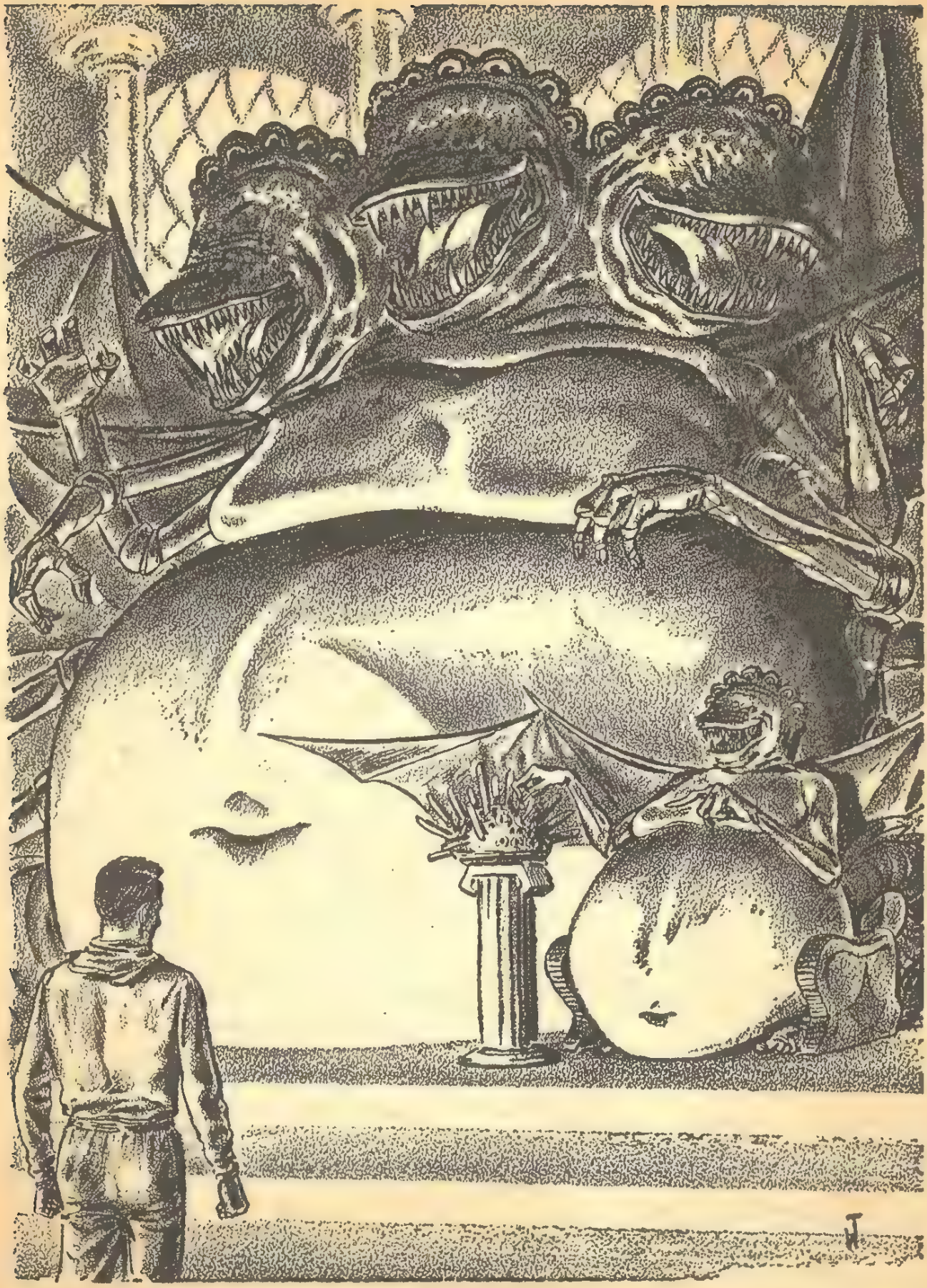


*Illustration by W. E. Terry*

dence this night. He literally sagged, in body, mind and spirit.

He paused in his pacing to turn to his friend, Burgess, and ask, "How long now?"

Harold Burgess, two years his senior, was also a victim of the ceaseless labor to which Goodman had been so unconditionally dedicated. The catastrophe which had befallen the Earth three months previously and which now crept inexorably upon this last stronghold of free men had decimated the ranks of the Representatives, leaving him and his revered leader, Goodman, as the only surviving members of that erstwhile august body of philosopher scientists who had governed the Earth. Frail, slight of build, bald, myopic and bespectacled, Burgess looked frighteningly forlorn and helpless as he read the indications on his meters.

"About five minutes," he replied, looking intently, almost pleadingly, at his companion. "Marlowe," he said. It had always been his habit to use Goodman's middle name. "What are you waiting for? Get at those controls! The new weapon—the ether vortex! It is our last chance!"

Goodman, however, continued to pace the floor and run his hands through his dark hair. His deepset eyes smouldered angrily under his bushy brows and cold sweat sprang out on his forehead. Not even Burgess could have sounded the depths of that renowned mentality as it groped feverishly for one last shred of hope for the vast society of humans to whom his life had been dedicated.

For he knew that the ether vortex was not enough . . .

OUTSIDE the transparent metal globe that enclosed the towering palace of the Terrestrial Government, lightning, wind and rain ineffectually assailed the gargantuan Sequoiah graves of the California Sierras. But a much greater threat than Nature, itself, flashed through the stratosphere high above the tempest, a seemingly interminable fleet of saucer-shaped space ships. These were the "flying saucers" of old, which had been seen by men intermittently for centuries and laughed at. Man in his egotism had sought to reduce the higher Unknown to the meager level of his own understanding, calling these things experimental aircraft, publicity gadgets, even hallucinations—refusing to recognize them for what they were, until it was too late.

Out of the depths of interstellar space they had come at last in force, a superior race bent on galactic conquest and colonization, a fierce and unyielding horde which cast the world shaking armies of all earthly conquerors of the past into pale insignificance. For centuries, men had harbored only in the private subcellars of their minds the instinctive fear of extra-terrestrial aggression, yet few there were who had dared

express such a fear openly. Now here was that dreaded enemy—no comical characters out of the funny books, but apathetic, super-intelligent, utterly alien realities, moving with the certainty of Fate against Man's last citadel—without compromise, haughtily demanding unconditional surrender.

One month before they had attacked this place with a mere token force of scout ships and had met with the greatest human resistance which they had experienced, but the human defenders had been fatally weakened and now the enemy was returning from his Southern California bases in full strength. All Earth was a smouldering shambles, and the subjugated remnants of humanity were being rounded up exactly like so much livestock. In three months the conquering race of the *Khri,* from some distant and accursed planet of another star, had utterly flattened a highly developed civilization as one might obliterate herd trails in the process of clearing a field for purposes of construction. They permitted no possibility of appeal for leniency, no more than humans might have conceived of listening to cattle. Their purpose—absolute and unquestioned possession of the planet—had been practically achieved. Humans were being tolerated as a source of food and slave labor—nothing more.

There only remained the minor task of wiping out the Terrestrial Government's last spark of resistance. Dar Littri, planetary governor of the *Khri,* had ordained that as many as possible of the humans inside the fortress should be taken alive. But even he did not know that Goodman and Burgess, alone, remained as defenders, together with their loved ones, who were locked in a vault deep below the combined palace and fortress.

That, in part, was what Goodman was thinking about—his family and Burgess' family, huddled there in that steel-walled chamber below, tensely awaiting the results of his recently finished weapon, the ether vortex.

His wife, Flora, tall and stately as a young queen mother, the joyful spirit that had glowed in her brown eyes now subdued by sorrow. Wise, patient Flora, giving courage and faith to others around her even while her own was failing. She had been a marvelous help to him in carrying out his basic plans for social reconstruction, a spiritual light in the world.

Goodman slapped his forehead and wiped the sweat from it in desperation. Was this epitomy of gentle womanhood, of feminine grace and saintly compassion, this perfect example of mother and wife, to be suddenly reduced to the status of a pedigreed beef cow, to satisfy the appetite of inhuman monstrosities? No! Let her suffocate in the vault together with the children! Yet the thought of abandoning her and the others to any kind of death at all

was insupportable to Goodman. It threatened him with a madness that only the greatest effort of his reasoning powers could avert.

There in the vault was his baby boy, Craig, three years of age, and his other son, Paul, who was five. And Anne Burgess, his friend's wife, and her two year old daughter, Marjorie. He could visualize Marjorie growing up under the *Khri* regime. They would probably consider her as something akin to a heifer!—maybe breed her with some apish brute from the lowest dregs of human society!—cause her to give birth to stupid quintuplets under their fiendish breeder rays, stories of which had come to him through underground channels.

Goodman *was* going crazy. He groaned aloud as he paced the steel floor of the war ray chamber.

"Marlowe!" said Burgess, sternly. "You must get to those controls! The *Khri* will start firing at us in about one minute. *Think*, man! The ether vortex is Man's last hope! You are its inventor. It is in your hands! I can appreciate your personal anxiety, because I have the same things at stake, but you cannot permit yourself to forget the millions of humans who still live and who might someday be saved if *you* gave them this chance!"

SO Goodman finally gave in, although in his heart and mind he harbored no hope of victory. He stepped over to the massive array of high frequency apparatus which represented the scientific labors of half a lifetime. He sat down in a chair before the control panel.

"I wish," he said, as though speaking more to himself than to Burgess, "that I had gone further with my research. There are certain unfinished phases of my work. I—"

"Never mind that!" interjected Burgess. "Start your adjustments! The vortex destroys utterly anything that falls within its focus. You and I both know that after seeing the path you cut among the Sequoiah trees outside today. It is the only thing that can penetrate the enemy's guard screens and it is your sacred duty to make use of this weapon!"

Burgess regretted that there was no time to discuss the mystery that surrounded Goodman's researches in connection with the ether vortex. There had been one period, some years back, when Goodman had taken leave and gone to his private laboratory in Arizona for almost a year. When Burgess had gone to summon him back to Council he had been unable to locate him anywhere. Later, Goodman had returned of his own accord, somehow changed, mysteriously inspired, as though he had fallen upon some dark secret of the gods and dared not share it with other mortals. At times Burgess had tried to rationalize himself into believing that the ether vortex, itself, and that secret which Goodman had only recently revealed to him, but deep within himself there

stirred a restless thought: Was there something else, of even greater proportions, that Goodman was keeping to himself? And if this were so, why had he refused to share it even with *him?*

"If only I had just a little more time for research," Goodman complained, even as he sought out the enemy with the detectors. "There are certain equations which I have never fully checked on the computers. I—"

"Quiet!" admonished Burgess. "Concentrate, Marlowe! Destroy the enemy!"

"I dare not envelop the *Khri,* themselves, in the vortex," Goodman said. "Only their ships. Parts of their ships, the bows and the driver sections, but not the *Khri.* Not those inhuman monstrosities!"

"Why?" queried Burgess, watching the detector scopes. Then—"Never mind! *Fire!*"

While Burgess nursed the titanic guard screen generators until the whole fortress shook with the tempest of unleashed energy, Goodman merely watched a visiscreen in front of him and maneuvered several small levers. The pin-point images on the screen suddenly spread out, magnified, and he saw the enemy's ships plainly. They were coming to a stop, deploying themselves into strategic positions above the fortress. There were hundreds of them, an overwhelming force that made Goodman laugh in bitter irony even as one ship's rounded prow moved over the cross-hairs on the screen.

Then in the same instant he sobered, his eyes shadowed by secret thoughts as he remembered the weapon he was about to wield. As though tampering with a terrible and forbidden force of the gods, he fired. And like some evil spirit of darkness, like some mighty djinn responding to his summons out of an unimagined plane of existence, the awful vortex of nothing appeared to wipe the front of the enemy space ship out of existence. It was as though some Titan had been repainting the firmament and had obliterated the ship's prow with a bold brush stroke of black.

"Marvelous!" enthused Burgess. "The first really effectual blow we have been able to strike!"

Goodman sliced the noses off a half dozen more ships. Then his piercing, grayish-blue eyes met Burgess' myopic, light blue ones.

"You don't *really* think we can stop them, do you?" he said. "This is only one weapon against inexhaustible numbers. While I am disabling or shooting down scores of ships above us, dozens of scores of others can work in on the sidelines at lower altitudes and penetrate our screens by combining their rays. No, Harold, we are too late with too little!"

Goodman deserted his controls and stood up, backing away from the ether vortex apparatus. Suddenly, he pulled a disruptor gun out of his pocket.

"Get away from the board!" he

told Burgess. "Quickly!"

Burgess' magnified eyes widened further. He still sat where he was, watching Goodman as though paralyzed. Then he said, almost coldly, "What are you going to do?"

"I can't let the ether vortex fall into their hands," replied Goodman. "In another minute we'll be killed off or incapacitated when their rays penetrate our shields. I can't leave *them* the vortex! I can't!"

"So you're going to give up," said Burgess in bitter disappointment. "Not going to kill off as many as you can before they take us."

"To what purpose? Delay might give them the vortex. I must destroy it—now! Get out of the way!"

Goodman's strong face was gray as ashes, ashes covered with the dew of cold sweat. As Burgess finally moved out of the way, Goodman took a last, fond look at the major product of his life's scientific work, which represented secrets that he had not yet revealed to anyone. The enemy had come too soon, robbing him of the precious time he needed in which to prove certain equations which meant—

Suddenly, the room was filled with a lavender light and his body tingled strangely, as though it were becoming rigid.

"It's a *Khri* ray!" warned Burgess. "They've broken through the guard screen!"

So Goodman fired his disruptor and the glittering, mysterious brain child of a genius flashed blindingly into extinction.

It was none too soon. The lavender light paralyzed them, became nameless substance, like gelatin, holding them immovably on their feet. They seemed not to be breathing, nor were they conscious of a pulse running in their arteries, yet they remained weirdly awake.

They could still see the visiscreen which had not been destroyed by the disruptor. In it, both men saw strange and horrifying things occur. Neither of them had ever actually seen a member of the *Khri* race, but word had come to them from those who had caught a glimpse of them that they were inhuman, hideous.

*Now* Goodman and Burgess were looking at them! They could see them in the visiscreen.

One of the ships which had been sliced by Goodman's vortex was falling, but its main hatch was wide open, and from it some of the *Khri* were also falling, while yet others were flying. They were not flying by means of mechanical contrivances or rockets or electronic devices, but under their own power! Although some flew clumsily, as though unaccustomed to it, and others fell to their deaths, the evidence was incontrovertible.

*The Khri were winged creatures!*

"My God!" exclaimed Burgess, who was still able to mutter through his clenched teeth. "How can it be? They are reptilian — like — like pterodactyls!"

"Not exactly," Goodman managed

to reply. "But at least they seem to have evolved from some branch of the ornithosauria."

For an instant, one of the *Khri* paused in mid-flight, as though trying to get his bearings. In the magnified view offered by the visiscreen, both Earthmen saw him plainly. His large, reptilian head was characterized chiefly by its broad but flat looking cranium and a set of vicious looking jaws that were much shorter than might have been expected among related species of the ornithosauria prevalent in Earth's Mesozoic strata. The most outstanding feature of the head was its three, chameleon-like eyes, evenly spaced around the base of the cranium to give three hundred and sixty degrees of vision. His neck was shorter, also, than might have been expected, and he had six limbs and a short, flat tail. The two rear limbs were large, ending in taloned feet. The two central limbs were small, attached to the thorax, but terminated in unusually prehensile fingers. The top set of limbs were enormously elongated and triple-jointed, stretching out to form a frame for the leathery looking membranes that formed the wings. These membranes were attached to the body all the way back to the sacrum. On his back he was black and scaly. His underside was reddish, under the wings, and greenish white on the thorax and abdomen.

"It—it's an hallucination!" protested Burgess. "It can't be!"

"Why not?" answered Goodman in a muffled tone, through the purple murk. "Why should the fact that one species of mammal developed to supremacy on Earth establish a law preventing the higher development of other forms of life elsewhere? Space and matter are infinite. So are the probabilities. What you see before you is what might have developed on Earth had the saurians not been wiped out by an abrupt change in their environment."

"But—good God, man!" spluttered Burgess, laboriously. "How can you stand there and calmly theorize when they'll be entering here any minute! What about Flora and Ann and Marjorie and Craig and Paul—down in the vault!"

"Pray God," said Goodman, "that the *Khri* will not find them!"

"But they'll smother! They'll die!"

"Yes. One way or another," replied Goodman, "they will die. But there is a choice between *ways* of dying. Harold, I don't want you to reveal, even under torture, that there is anyone here but us!"

THE lavender light soon faded, but as it did so it seemed to remove its physical support, and Burgess and Goodman collapsed numbly to the floor like defenseless creatures hypnotized by the serpent's stare. They had not long to wait for their captors. Incapacitated though they were, they could hear the *Khri* coming.

They were advancing up the emer-

gency ramp from the rocket gyro landing area. Both Earthmen felt their flesh shiver. If they had been Lilliputians lying underground in a lizard's nest they would have expected to hear just such a sound as that which the *Khri* were making. Slithering, scaly rustlings and nearly ultra-sonic sussurations—the indescribable traffic sounds of a horde of merciless reptiles rushing toward them!

In the next instant they were surrounded by them, by the cold-blooded spawn of some unknown planet or entire solar system lost in Infinity, by members of a vastly inhuman race which was so far advanced beyond the species, *homo sapiens*, that it had stamped out the latter's sprawling civilization as easily as the forces of a great empire might subdue a minor colonial revolt.

About ten of them crowded into the large war ray chamber and scores of others scurried or slithered about outside. Through great skylights the two Earthmen, lying on their backs, could see the high, transparent globe that covered the palace. It was swarming with the *Khri*. They seemed to live in a faster tempo than humans. Their movements were lightning swift and energetic. They were all like fantastic, scaled automatons, moving in accordance with a single mass instinct.

The *Khri* seemed to have no other means of vocalization than a set of membranes concealed in their throats, which produced the high-pitched whispering vibration that was continuously audible to the Earthmen. Lying at the upper limit of audibility, the sound was very irritating to them.

One of the *Khri* who was apparently the top ranking officer of this task force came very close to Goodman. His hard-skinned face that was not a face loomed over him and two chameleon eyes located where there should have been ears swiveled in pearl colored sclerotic rings to focus upon him balefully. His multi-jointed talon-fingers poked at Goodman's body and limbs as though to estimate his value in terms of edible flesh. An adjutant *Khri* did the same to Burgess.

Then Goodman saw the facial and body pigments of his captor change swiftly in a kaleidoscopic ripple of unearthly coloration, almost like some sort of electrical iridescence. The colors in the face and eyes slowly deepened, as though there were some correlation between the depth of shades and the degree of mental concentration. Suddenly, the Earthman felt something alien passing over his brain, inside his skull, like a rippling heat wave. He could have sworn the thing was reading his mind!

Goodman's pulse increased under the impetus of terror. For one fleeting instant his conscious mind was cruelly obsessed by the one thought he wished most to conceal: *the vault!*

By an almost superhuman effort

he pushed that thought out of his mind. He thought desperately of something else, counted sheep, reviewed logarithms, multiplication tables, mathematical equations, engulfed himself in contemplation of the twenty-first century ramifications of Relativity—anything to confuse or distract the alien intelligence that had invaded the privacy of his mind, anything to avoid the capture of those who meant more to him than his own life!

But it was useless. He knew that this *Khri* officer knew about the vault now. He knew that in a matter of seconds there would be several of his aides blasting secret doors apart to get to that precious hiding place. He could even imagine the expression of horror on the faces of his and Burgess' loved ones when the vault door dissolved under the enemy's efficient disintegration rays—when they first looked upon the hideous *Khri* who knew nothing and cared to know nothing about the human heart and soul!

Burgess and Flora and Anne were soon to wonder if it was not under the strain of that terrible moment that Goodman cracked. For when they met again they found that this greatest of the world's altruistic leaders, this greatest protector and benefactor of Mankind, had become —*something else* . . .

* * *

THEY were reunited in Hollywood. The temporary northern headquarters of Dar Littri were situated on top of the Hollywoodland Hills in the New Hollywood Planetarium. He had been intrigued by the amazing ingenuity of the inferior humans who had built a machine which could reproduce the firmament of nearby stars, including his own star, so realistically, and he enjoyed the use of the great electrotelescopes in the observatory. He liked the cool darkness of the great, domed planetarium chamber because it reminded him of the dark cave cities of the home planets of his solar system. And so he had set up one of his thrones there. It was to this place that Goodman and Burgess were brought, and Flora and Anne and the three children were taken there in a following vessel.

The *Khri* were not given to inefficiency or ceremony. When they brought their important prisoners to the planetarium they marched them immediately into the presence of Dar Littri, himself. Goodman and Burgess arrived first. They observed that the great, domed chamber was only softly lighted, but sufficiently to illuminate a conspicuous new addition.

It was a throne—the throne of a winged reptile. It was nothing more than a glistening platform of transparent metal raised on four black pillars, about ten feet off the floor. From underneath, special rays of warmth and stimulation played upward, through the platform, against the large, pale green

belly of the ruler. From above the throne a battery of other rays shone downward. Some of the rays were close to being invisible. Some were red and others were green. Some flashed intermittently, creating a hypnotic effect.

In addition to the throne, they soon perceived another addition which turned both Earthmen's minds into a much broader field of wondering speculation. For here they were first introduced to *Amkhah.*

Amkhah was a hideous, heathen god of shining brass, thirty feet high. He was a grotesque caricature of the *Khri,* with three extra sets of jointed limbs, two sets of great, bat-like wings, and three reptilian heads all equipped with an encircling row of great, bugged-out eyes. He squatted heavily on three broad, flat tails and his distended paunch touched the floor in front of him. The great wings were spread in an incongruous gesture of benevolence and welcome, while each of the multi-fanged mouths opened wide as though in monstrous laughter. Both of the prisoners noted a stone altar in front of Amkhah, darkened and streaked with what seemed to be dried blood.

There was no time for further conjecture, however, for Dar Littri now commanded their attention. He was larger than any of the *Khri* which the Earthmen had seen, and he had been amply provided with the signs of nobility of his race. The heavier, leathery sections of his body, including the bony, pearl-colored sclerotics around his eyes, were encrusted with sparkling jewels whose color and depth were accentuated by the vari-colored rays that bathed him.

On the throne platform in front of Dar Littri was a weird apparatus that looked like a giant, spiny sea-urchin in which radiotronic devices had been installed. Dar Littri's versatile, jeweled hands adjusted hidden controls on this and tapped various spikes that extended upward from the apparatus. The result was the translation of *Khri* thought into audible human speech —a metallic, eerily whining simulation of English. Dar Littri spoke to them through the thought translator.

"Answer me, yes or no," he said, emphatically. "Are you the highest ranking humans of the Terrestrial Government?"

Burgess looked at Goodman. The latter was staring at the brazen god, Amkhah. There was a strangely detached expression on his face. It was as though he were in a trance, yet beset by terrible visions. Horror mothered desperation in his eyes.

Burgess answered Dar Littri. "Yes," he said, knowing that so far this was mere official routine, inasmuch as the *Khri* already knew who they were, having read their minds.

And then a startling idea penetrated his consciousness. *Could* they read their minds?—completely, that is. Perhaps there was some missing factor which kept the *Khri* from probing the essential depths of hu-

man intelligence! He wondered if Goodman had thought of this, and he suddenly prayed that his friend was already working on this angle, if it were actually valid. Though to what avail he could not imagine. All he knew was that Goodman was the top representative of Mankind. He was the last hope on Earth. He *had* to think of something — and quickly!

"Which of you is the higher?" came Dar Littri's synthetic voice.

Burgess hesitated, looking again at Goodman.

"I see," said Dar Littri. "The dark-haired one is James Marlowe Goodman, President of Earth's Council of Representatives, the man who in your history books and factual literature has already been referred to as something of a saint. I have learned in your libraries that a saint is an elevated and glorified disciple or representative of God."

Dar Littri paused effectively and made a queer, clicking noise which, by connotation, could be interpreted as laughter—or at least a sardonic chuckle.

"Where is your God now?" he asked. "Have we conquered Him also? He has evidently done nothing to help you." Dar Littri paused again, looking down from the elevation of his throne at the Earthmen, and the latter remained silent and expressionless.

"Or is this the Second Diluvium?" he continued, with astounding erudition. "Has your God forsaken you for your iniquities and given Paradise over to a new set of tenants?"

Again the Earthmen were silent. And again came the sardonic, clicking chuckle.

"Your spiritual concepts are quite unique and amusing," he said, "but they are foolish. Basically, you are all undeveloped adults. Removed by physical maturity from the soft security and comfort of your mothers' breasts, you erect in your minds yet another shield against the necessity of directly meeting the reality of existence face to face. You have created a false concept of duality, a supposed *soul,* or second ego, which will continue in Eternity after your physical bodies have been destroyed. And you cling to this invisible God of yours and pray to Him vainly for assistance and succor. This is nothing more than a mental retrogression to your mothers' breasts. You are a soft, puerile species, as are all Mammalia, passive, undeveloped, incapable of facing reality and conquering your environment. You deserve to lose this planet to your superiors!

"We are what you would call atheistic—godless. Our sole doctrine is based on natural law: *Only the fittest shall survive. The weak must be food for the strong!*

"However, the human masses must be controlled by us in an efficient manner and in a way that will best suit our purpose. It seems that in the darkest moments of your history you have been most effectively controlled by the forces of super-

stition.

"I have read in your history of the exodus from Egypt of the Israelites. There was a time when they turned to the worship of a graven image." Dar Littri waved a somber wing toward Amkhah. *"I give you once again a graven image,"* he said. "Amkhah is visible and tangible and can exact punishment and death. This is a god to inspire fear and respect, to hold the superstitious human masses in a state of self-hypnosis until they have served their useful purpose to their masters or have been sacrificed on the altar of Amkhah!"

* * *

THIS incredible monologue was interrupted by the arrival of Flora, Anne and the children—Marjorie Burgess, ittle Craig, and Paul. In addition, there were about fifty more prisoners taken from local sources. A fine strand of flexible metal served as a lead rope which was tied about their necks. They were brought in like cattle.

At the sight of her husband and Burgess, tall Flora's face brightened. She had feared they were dead. She gripped Anne's arm and whispered, "Don't give up hope! His ether vortex may have failed, but he and Harold are still with us!"

"But Flora!" Anne exclaimed. "They've done something strange to Marlowe! He doesn't even recognize us!"

Goodman turned and looked at Anne and Marjorie, at his wife and two sons, but he might as well have been gazing through a glass door. He turned away to look again at Amkhah.

Little Paul pulled at his mother's skirts and whimpered. "Daddy's sick!" he cried. "Daddy's sick!"

Flora's keen eyes narrowed as she looked from the bloodied altar of Amkhah to the jewel-clustered body of Dar Littri. "Maybe he knows what he's doing," she said to Anne. "Just hold tight and watch him and Harold."

"Oh we are so helpless!" Anne cried, unable to suppress her tears. And all three children began to wail bitterly.

Flora softened. She smiled gently, patting each small head. "Now you may know the rewards of Faith," she said, as much to encourage Anne as them. "When all else is lost, when our earthly values have dissolved, when we stand ready to be dispossessed of mortal life, itself, then we become aware, as never before, of the almighty presence of God. Do not fear violence at the hands of these creatures, my children, for surely they can do no more than open the door that leads to Him." Flora was a worthy companion for a saint.

But no one knew what had happened to Goodman, not even Burgess. He could only stare intermittently and perturbedly at his lifelong companion while Dar Littri

continued addressing them.

"The brazen image of Amkhah has been set up in every temple devoted to worship, regardless of previous creed, throughout the world. Humans are being chosen everywhere to be the priests of Amkhah. Religion is being standardized by this method. In exchange for ordinary service to Amkhah, we permit these priests to live. To the high priests we will be even more generous, permitting them to live in luxury."

"Who would want to live at all!" exclaimed one of the other male prisoners, a middle aged man with iron gray hair. In normal life he might have been a lawyer or a teacher.

For answer, a *Khri* guard leapt upon him and gripped the back of his neck with his teeth. There was a loud, snapping sound and the Earthman's head slumped on his chest. Viciously, the *Khri* shook him and then cast him into the pool of his own blood. Three female prisoners fainted, amidst screams of terror from all the rest.

Calmly, Dar Littri continued. "You, Goodman, and you, Burgess, are the highest leaders of your society. It is only fitting that you should be the leaders in the only remaining human organization which we will allow to exist on Earth. You two will be the High Priests of Amkhah. You are highly intelligent representatives of your species. You could never actually believe in Amkhah. So much the better. Some of the most learned priests in the history of your civilization have been atheists, no doubt, but their very intelligence enabled them to evaluate properly the convenient, formative power of superstition—or faith. Well? What do you say to this?"

Goodman still did not choose to speak, so Burgess became the spokesman. "Of what," he said, "do these 'services' to Amkhah consist?"

Goodman looked at Dar Littri, suddenly alert.

"It is quite simple," replied the latter. "You should be able to deduce the answer to your own question." The *Khri* governor's jewel-encircled eyes darkened as he concentrated his gaze on Goodman. "In Amkhah I have created an instrument which I believe is peculiarly adapted to the problem of controlling great masses of humans. It will be up to you two, the High Priests of Amkhah, to wield that instrument to *our* best advantage. You will utilize all your powers of leadership and organization to create the most efficient ecclesiastical system ever devised on your planet. There shall be *blind* faith—unquestioning obedience to the will of Amkhah. Amkhah shall decree that we, the *Khri*, are the Chosen Ones, and that it is the sacred duty of all humans to serve them. Humans foolishly cling to the belief in their own duality. You, therefore, will capitalize on this and say that Amkhah has decreed that humans have lost their place because of their iniquities, and that the only chance for redemption

of their souls is through service to the *Khri* and obedience to Amkhah. The more fanatic their loyalty to the *Khri,* the greater shall be their rewards through Amkhah. But the offenders, the rebels among you, these shall be deprived of redemption. The symbol of their disgrace will be execution in the form of the live sacrifice of their own bodies upon the altars of Amkhah. Amkhah will be a stern and exacting god, inspiring terror and instant obedience to his laws. This will be up to you, as High Priests, to establish. If you do not succeed, then you will lose the luxuries and the freedom and protection I am able to give to you and your families."

Burgess' wife, Anne, could not control herself any longer.

"You are the *Beast!"* she screamed to Dar Littri. "Better for all of us to die than to serve you for an instant!" Before Flora could stop her, she turned to the nearest *Khri* guard and spat upon him.

Ominously, the guard's great wings opened. His three great eyes darkened with rage and he bared his fangs. But before he could leap upon her he was stayed by some command from his ruler. He paused, glaring at Dar Littri.

"This is what I mean by a rebel," said the latter. "To show you that I am not afflicted with the weakness of compassion, I am going to make you, Burgess, earn salvation for yourself and your daughter."

"My wife didn't know what she was doing!" Burgess cried out.

"You do not understand how lightly I evaluate your insignificant lives," said Dar Littri. "You will obey me, or you and your daughter shall also die!"

Burgess' shoulders slumped. "What must I do?" he asked.

"Make your first sacrifice to Amkhah!"

To illustrate what he meant, he made a sign to the guards, and they detached Anne from the line of prisoners. They carried her struggling form to the bloodied altar, while little Marjorie screamed in uncomprehending terror. The *Khri* guards stripped the remaining clothing from Anne's body and tied her to the altar.

"Sacrifice her!" commanded Dar Littri.

Burgess' eyes were fixed on his wife's white body. His fists were clenched and his jaws tightened in impotent rage.

"They'll kill us anyway!" cried Anne, from the altar.

"Merciful God, spare her!" exclaimed Flora, clutching Marjorie to her along with little Craig and Paul.

"There is no god," said Dar Littri, balefully. "None save Amkhah."

*"You lie!"* shouted Burgess, suddenly.

Every human in the throne room fell silent, even the children, and Anne. She could only lie there staring at her husband in wondering amazement. Even Goodman turned to stare at him intently.

Burgess glared at Goodman re-

sentfully, then took a step forward and faced Dar Littri.

"If my companion here cannot speak in the name of humanity, I *can!*" he said. He spoke suddenly with such boldness and dignity that all humans present took new courage, even in the face of futility. "I claim that you are only materially and, in some ways, mentally superior to us, but that in other ways, above all, spiritually, we are still as superior to you as we are to the snakes and lizards of our own world which we crush under our feet. It is only owing to your greater technology, numbers and physical strength that you have defeated us in a material sense. *But the fact remains that we are indestructible!* Our bodies are but shells for the Eternal Man. You speak of atheism and loss of faith. That is ridiculous! Why should we cast out that very thing which is our only salvation? Death means nothing more to our species than awakening from a dream. Now that you have contaminated this planet with your presence we no longer wish to cling to that dream which is called corporeality. Kindly do us the favor of exterminating all of us at once!"

"He is right!" cried other prisoners. "We agree! Kill us all!"

Flora began to recite aloud the twenty-third psalm, and she urged her neighbors to accompany her. In an instant, the whole room was filled with a rumbling assertion of human Faith:

*"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*

*"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;*

*He leadeth me beside the still waters.*

*"He restoreth my soul . . ."*

SURPRISINGLY, Dar Littri permitted them to finish the entire psalm, while he watched them meditatively. Then he spoke to Burgess, abruptly.

"You have a quaint saying in English—that 'the proof of the pudding is in the eating.' If your claims to Immortality are valid, then you should be able to prove that fact to me here and now. And if you prove it, it might possibly lead me to reevaluate your peculiar species."

"Name your proof!" shouted Burgess.

With suave dignity, Dar Littri waved a jewel-rimmed wing toward the altar. "If this life is but a dream," he said, "and if to die in a physical sense is but to awaken in Eternity to a more glorious life, then surely you should have no objection to giving your own wife such a noble reward . . . ?"

Again the room was silent, and all eyes were on Burgess once more. He did not move.

"I realize," said Dar Littri, with sardonic calmness, "that you are inhibited by that commandment of your religion which says—*'Thou shalt not kill!'* However, in this case surely you should be willing

to jeopardize your own spiritual fate in order to embrace this unprecedented opportunity to give proof of your faith in the dual nature of your kind. Make the sacrifice, Burgess! Send your beloved wife into Eternity!" The versatile translator did not fail to deliver to its listeners the impression of Dar Littri's satanic amusement—which only served to anger Burgess all the more.

He did not know whether the room was filled with sound or if it were as silent as a tomb. He was deaf to everything now except the pounding of his heart and the clamor of his own thoughts as his eyes sought those of his wife. She lay helplessly on the altar, unable to judge what the answer should be. She could only look back at him, horribly fascinated. The only actual sound in the room was the piteous wailing of a small child. Her child—Marjorie.

Then, slowly, Burgess began to move toward the altar . . .

But in the same moment he felt steely fingers close on his arm and he looked, startled, into the face of his lifelong friend, James Marlowe Goodman. The latter's deepset eyes almost glowed with the fire of his thought. If ever Burgess had seen the look of desperation in another's countenance, this was the essence of it. It held him paralyzed for the moment.

Goodman threw him sideward, out of the way, and Burgess fell to the floor, looking amazedly after him as he walked over to the throne of Dar Littri.

The dark planetarium was cathedral-like in its stillness as all eyes watched the number one leader of Mankind prepare to play his last card before the number one leader of the conquering race. Even the *Khri* guards and Dar Littri, himself, seemed to tense with a wondering expectancy.

Goodman had refused to recognize his friends and loved ones. He had refrained from speaking, and during the ordeal resulting in Anne's present predicament he had remained dispassionate, as though he were immersed in thoughts of transcendent proportions. Flora and Burgess and Anne thought that whatever Goodman said or did now would be, officially, Man's last bid for life—which, in effect, it was . . .

"WE humans," said Goodman to Dar Littri, in a dramatic, authoritative and inspired tone of voice, "must adopt a cosmic perspective of our present situation. Our era is at an end. The species, *homo sapiens,* has been supplanted by a superior species. We must accept the inevitability of natural law, that *the fittest shall survive.*

"But it is also a natural law that each species must attempt to preserve itself. The purpose of my argument, therefore, is to bargain with you to procure, as a result of that bargain, amnesty for at least enough of us so that our kind will not die."

"You are not in a position to

bargain," interrupted Dar Littri, icily. "We are the master race and you are helpless grubs under our feet." Dar Littri's synthetic voice rose from the translator in ear splitting volume. "The *Khri* dispose! Mankind will do as it is told!"

"You *have* disposed," agreed Goodman. "You have told us what you want from us, and it is my intention to obey your commands. However, I have something to offer that will make it possible for me, as High Priest of Amkhah, to achieve much more practical results for you than with your own plan. In exchange for this faithful service and cooperation I merely ask two things. First, that we dispense with the idea of the human sacrifice, and secondly, that you permit a sufficient portion of our kind to live as human beings rather than as cattle, so that our species may be preserved."

Silence followed this speech, but only for a brief moment. Then Dar Littri replied.

"Naturally, you fill me with suspicion," he said. "So choose your words carefully. What can you offer that would entice me to grant you your two requests?"

"Burgess, here," said Goodman, "was just about to demonstrate the ineradicable faith we have in our duality. You can see for yourself the advantage it gives us, in a way. It is such an advantage that the threat of the human sacrifice is insufficient to achieve your purpose of blind obedience to your laws and those which we may establish, with your permission, in the name of Amkhah. There is a greater threat—one known only to myself—which will strike at the very roots of their instinct and fill them with such terror that they will obey any command to escape the kind of fate I could prepare for them."

A mingled cry of amazement and resentment arose from the humans in the room. Flora studied her husband without expression, but Burgess looked at him with growing suspicion and alarm.

"I'm still suspicious and unconvinced," said Dar Littri, "but your speech intrigues me. What is this fate of fates that is known only to you?"

"Suppose," said Goodman, "that I could take the rebels among our kind and sacrifice them to Amkhah in such a way that *both* components of their egos would die—the body *and* the soul?"

Amidst a clamor of protest from the prisoners, Dar Littri's clicking laughter could be heard. "I see that you, at least, are possessed of a saving intelligence. Even if you lie, the concept is very amusing—really quite clever. If you could rob the victims of the sacrifice of their hope of Immortality, I believe you would really have them where we'd want them. But how can you accomplish this—this Ultimate Death?"

"I alone," said Goodman, "am the master of an ancient power. Or at least I can call it into being, even though it is incomprehensible even

to me."

"Do you mean your so-called ether vortex—the weapon you destroyed before you were captured?"

"Ether vortex is a false name," said Goodman, emphatically. "It is mere camouflage for the dark and nameless power that pierced your guard screens and crippled your ships. If this thing that I have found by accident is not an ancient god, it is the equivalent. I can bring it into being and keep it alive in the Sanctum Sanctorum of the temple and call it — Amkhah — the *Ultimate Death*. Whoever is given into the arms of *that* Amkhah will never live again—in this world *or* the next!"

"It's a trick!" Burgess cried out. "Marlowe! You can't mean—"

"Silence!" Dar Littri commanded. His great eyes stared intently at Goodman. "Indeed, this may well be a trick," he said. "I do not recognize in your proposal the motives of a saint. Let us see if there is not some other motive behind all this."

In that instant, Dar Littri's great eyes darkened and Goodman knew that he was reading his mind. Goodman stood there, unafraid, staring straight back into those great, iridescent globes, exactly as if he had nothing to hide. Burgess, Flora and Anne and the other humans could only wait in fear and puzzlement.

What Dar Littri found in Goodman's mind was startling even to him. His weird eyes swirled with coalescing colors. He made strange, clicking noises. Then he spoke to the other humans in the room.

"This man, Goodman, is causing me to alter my evaluation of human intelligence. You are a higher order of Mammalia than previous analyses indicated. Your 'saint' is truly a cosmic thinker. I will translate his thought so that I may have your own reaction. In other words, I want all of you to read his mind."

Goodman shifted uneasily, but he stood his ground. Dar Littri's taloned hands manipulated the machine in front of him and suddenly everyone present was listening to Goodman's voiced thoughts:

"Existence is maintained only by the process of construction and destruction. Such is the eternal cycle. This is the oscillation or vibration which is energy and the foundation of matter. But perfection, by this law, is non-existence, a vacuum, which Nature abhors, because perfection lacks the surge of the tides of construction and destruction. Nature abhors the vacuum that is perfection by deliberately maintaining imperfection—imbalance. Construction and destruction, good and evil, are necessarily coexistent. There are the catalysts of Change, which is Existence. The one is as necessary to existence as the other. Therefore, in the cosmic sense, each may be evaluated equally. Each is an inseparable force of Nature.

"If, then, the means of doing good are taken from us but a way be left open to evil, then black can

live as well as white. Evil is as strong as good. I will be evil, for as such I will be useful to my masters, who are the *Khri,* and being useful to them is the only way that I may have a chance for survival. I will not only give them Amkhah, the Ultimate Death, but I will be their obedient slave and do exactly as they wish . . ."

Such were the thoughts of James Marlowe Goodman, trusted leader of Humanity, beloved husband and father, benevolent scientist — the man whom the world had regarded as a living saint. More disillusioning to Burgess yet was the apparent fact that the *Khri* actually could read the human mind with a deadly efficiency. So he decided not to try disguising his own thoughts.

"You coward!' he shouted, as he leaped at Goodman and grasped his throat.

Goodman turned upon him and struck him down, while many of the men prisoners lunged out of line to try to get at their erstwhile leader. While the *Khri* guards beat them back into line, Flora bowed her head and prayed through her tears. Anne, on the altar, just looked at her fallen husband and wept.

Then Dar Littri spoke. "Your general reaction is quite favorable," he said, and he made a sign to the guards, whereupon they began to release Anne from the altar. "You," he said to Goodman, "are the High Priest of Amkhah—Lord of the Ultimate Death . . . "

AS Craig Goodman grew up, he was surrounded and affected by an environment that was stranger than any Earth boy before him had ever known. The permanent palace of Dar Littri, planetary governor of the *Khri,* as well as the somber gardens and the main temple of Amkhah, were situated in an otherwise bleak and mountainous region of Arizona. The location, he had learned, had been determined by his father, the High Priest of Amkhah —for it was only here, according to the legend told to him in his childhood, that the dark spirit of Amkhah, Lord of the Ultimate Death, could be called out of the nameless world in which it lived.

He and his older brother, Paul, and Marjorie, who was crazy old Burgess' daughter, lived comfortably enough in the protective custody of Dar Littri's great court, but they were bound by the threat of death never to leave the grounds. The grounds were ample enough, stretching for many miles in every direction, but it was the reason behind this restriction which had intrigued Craig at an early age.

He knew very well that the world had once belonged to his own kind and that the *Khri* were alien conquerors. He knew, furthermore, that he and Marjorie and his brother Paul were especially privileged children, because there were other humans at the palace and at the temple who did not fare as well as they. These latter, with the exception of the lesser temple priests and

acolytes, were the merest slaves, who had been conditioned by a harsh life to move about and obey the commands of their three-eyed masters without question or thought of revolt. He had seen enough of cruelty and mercilessness on the part of the *Khri* overlords to believe the stories he had heard concerning the *outside*.

Out there in the world at large were great and thriving cities of the *Khri*, where humans were bred like cattle and eaten like so much beef. True, there were many small ecclesiastical communities where the human priests of Amkhah were suffered to live in reasonable comfort and security, but for the most part Mankind had ceased to exist in the same sense that it had existed before the coming of the *Khri*.

Craig had learned these things and much more—more than was proper for an acolyte in the service of Amkhah. In fact, inasmuch as he was being carefully trained to follow in the footsteps of his father, to be *the* High Priest, what his mother, Flora, and Marjorie's mother, Anne Burgess, had told him was vitally dangerous information. So deadly was his knowledge that he had refrained from sharing it with either Marjorie or Paul. For had it not caused Anne's and Flora's ultimate death in the arms of Amkhah?

Though he had been only thirteen years old at the time, he knew he would never forget that day when they were sacrificed, at the order of Dar Littri, himself. It was the day that old Burgess apparently lost his mind.

Craig never failed to be horribly fascinated, as were his brother and Marjorie, by the abject terror which the real and living Amkhah could inspire in his victims when he appeared out of darkness in the temple. Actually, his appearance was only a marked deepening of the darkness, but one *felt* his terrible presence. Craig had seen humans die bravely at the hands of the *Khri*. To die in blood and violence was an acceptable fate, but to die the Ultimate Death, in the arms of Amkhah, was completely untenable to any human. For in the death given by Amkhah there was no Beyond. In Amkhah, Man's right to Eternity was denied.

Therefore, the sacrifice of Flora Goodman and Anne Burgess had been unusual in that they had not gone insane with fear for their souls like all the rest. At a command from his father, the High Priest, they had walked into the terrible blackness of Amkhah's embrace without flinching, just as if they were certain that the old Christian God's promise of Immortality would be fulfilled. And it was chiefly this experience which at times helped sustain Craig's belief in what Anne Burgess and his mother had told him. It was a deadly, sacrilegious knowledge. He had to keep it to himself, in a hidden corner of his brain, for fear that the *Khri* might someday read it there.

Then at other times, he had often thought, perhaps they did not, themselves, believe what they had told him. Their bravery before Amkhah had perhaps only been a wonderful show for his benefit, because they really did not know that what they told him was true. It was only a suspicion, left as a heritage for him alone— to prove and make use of if he could.

Why the two women had chosen him for their pupil, in their secret desperation, he had been at a loss to explain, until Marjorie told him— without realizing that she had told him what he had been waiting to hear.

HE was eighteen when she told him. He loved her, just as she loved him, and Paul loved her, too, after a fashion. But there was not much jealousy between the two brothers because Marjorie apparently loved them both. The fundamental fact was—she had not decided between them. As priestess of Amkhah, she would be allowed to bear children of one of them, because their lineage was to be continued.

Seventeen years, for a girl, however, was the warm afternoon of adolescence, and the free spirit of her youth had already begun to encounter that inner loneliness of maturity which cries out for companionship. So it was with her that day when she told Craig what he wanted to know about himself.

They had gone exploring among the hills along the eastern border of the palace grounds. In their childhood they had become familiar with these hills. They knew every hilltop, ravine and gully—the secret places, the creeks and swimming holes and caverns. But they always enjoyed such outings, with Paul or without him, because in that lonely wilderness they did not have to look at the hideous *Khri* people, and they felt that at least that little piece of the world was theirs.

On their way home, they had stopped to rest on a high hill, beneath a twisted oak tree that had borne their initials for many years. The sun was setting in a flaming cauldron of scarlet clouds, and they sat contemplating the scene in silent enjoyment of each other's company.

"The palace is beautiful in the red light," he commented.

"Deceptive beauty," she added, pensively.

"What do you mean?"

Marjorie tossed the heavy locks of her coppery colored hair over her shoulder and looked into Craig's eyes. "I am thinking of the ugly *Khri,*" she said. "Their physical ugliness and their merciless, bloodthirsty ways."

Craig frowned. "That is dangerous sacrilege," he said. "The *Khri* are the Chosen Ones of Amkhah."

Marjorie regarded him intently. "Do you honestly believe that?" she asked him.

He hesitated, looking away. Then, suddenly, she grasped his hand in both of hers. "Oh Craig! I'm

frightened!" she exclaimed. "And so confused! If my doubts are unreasonable, then tell me, Craig! Tell me what I should believe! You are the only one I can talk to about these things!"

Craig sat motionless, studying her with blue-gray eyes.

"Why am I the only one you can talk to about it?" he asked. "Why not Paul or my father?"

"Oh you don't know what I mean!" she said. "Paul *really* believes in Amkhah. I have stood next to him at the high sacrifices, in the presence of the Darkness that is called Amkhah, and I have felt him tremble with fear and fanaticism. And my father is out of his mind. He follows your father blindly in all the rites of the temple. I cannot talk to him. And *your* father!" She sighed. "He seems to have lost his tongue, except when it comes to the incantations. No one can talk to *him!* I think he is as great a mystery as Amkhah, himself!"

Craig had to admit that this was remarkably true about his father. He had never been able to fathom his mind. He knew that even to Dar Littri, who could read human minds when he made a special effort to do so, the High Priest of Amkhah, Lord of the Ultimate Death, was unfathomable, even in spite of the fact that during the past ten years a peculiar friendship between the two had been established. Craig had often felt that if he could penetrate the mystery that was James Marlowe Goodman he would accomplish something that was of vital importance to all Humanity. Yet he could not explain why this was so—at least not quite.

"What troubles you about Amkhah?" he asked Marjorie.

"It all seems wrong, Craig," she told him. "The sacrifices, and the slavery and suffering of our kind. It seems so hopeless a life for all of us, and I seem to reject the thought, instinctively, that this condition of our race must endure forever. Do you know why I find myself telling you these things?"

Craig's gaze concentrated in her hazel eyes. "No," he said. "That's what I want to know."

"Because," she said, "there's a woman's instinct in me that tells me you are destined to solve the mystery. In your presence I sense something that is a mixture of hope and defiance. In you is embodied the only remaining challenge of our kind against our present environment."

Craig took both of her shoulders in his hands and stared at her. "My mother told me that!" he exclaimed. "And your mother felt it also! Why?" He shook her slightly. "Why?"

For answer, she threw herself helplessly into his arms and cried. "You tell *me* why, Craig! Some things I cannot explain or understand! All I know is that I—I need you, and you will find a way —to a different life for all of us!"

She looked up at him and they both found that their lips were wondrously close together. They became very quiet, all of a sudden, and the lowering sun felt warm on their faces.

"Marjorie," he said.

"Craig!"

When their lips met, they knew that at least one question had been answered. He held her and kissed her for several minutes, amazed and bewildered by the miracle that had come over them. Then he suddenly became aware of the emptiness of life.

"Something *should* be done about it," he said. "This life under the *Khri* is wrong. There must be another answer."

"That's what I've been wanting to tell you, dearest," she said, still resting in his arms. "There *must* be a way out, and if there is you'll find it!"

Suddenly he wanted to share his deadly secret with her, but he resisted, as he always had before. If he told her, the *Khri* might read her mind someday, and she would be sacrificed to Amkhah. No!—he thought. Now he could risk it less than ever before. He could not jeopardize the life of the woman who was to be his mate! Despite her love, he would have to carry the burden alone. But now one aspect was changed. Instead of merely harboring his dark secret he was determined to do something about it—if possible . . .

HIS brother, Paul, discovered him, which was as dangerous a circumstance as it was fortunate. A *Khri* would have placed him under arrest and subjected his mind to a searching analysis. And that would have been the end.

"What are you doing!" Paul exclaimed as he found Craig digging in the basement of the temple.

The pale illumination of a candelabra revealed that a great number of stones had been removed from one wall. In Craig's hand was a pick.

Craig stepped close to his brother. "What I am doing is my business," he said. "If you reveal this to a soul—" He tensed, and the pick rose slowly in the air, then dropped back to the floor.

Fear leaped into Paul's eyes. He surveyed his brother's grim countenance in uncomprehending amazement.

"But what is it!" he insisted. "What brings you here in the middle of the night to tear down these sacred walls?"

Craig snorted contemptuously. "You know they are not *that* sacred," he said. "Only less than twenty years ago, before the *Khri* invasion, they were a part of dad's secret laboratory. This is where he *created* Amkhah."

Paul recoiled, horrified. "That is sacrilege!" he exclaimed. "*No one* created Amkhah! He is a god—a terrible god of limitless power and wisdom! Beware, Craig! You are flirting with the Ultimate Death!"

Craig grasped his brother's tunic and pulled him to him. "You're a yellow livered coward!" he said. "That's why I'm telling you—keep your month shut about this or I'll kill you, and you know I can do it!"

"But I'm your own brother!"

"All right! Remember that, too! Let's stick together. I'm not asking you to do anything but keep your mouth shut! Now get out of here!"

"But—what are you trying to find?"

Craig was silent. He knew it would be useless to try to explain what Burgess had once remembered about his father's experiments in connection with the ether vortex and passed on verbally to Anne Burgess and Flora Goodman, that the vortex was the world's deadliest weapon and could have destroyed the *Khri,* but for some strange reason his father had been afraid to use it to full advantage. From childhood, Paul Goodman had been extremely impressive. He had swallowed the entire story about Amkhah together with the whole catechism of the synthetic religion. He was a fanatic young priest of the temple and could not be reconverted on short notice. Craig knew, therefore, that his secret burden was still his alone to bear.

"Just get going, will you?" he said, at last. He advanced toward his brother with the pick, and the other retreated.

"You had better desist all this at once," Paul admonished, in spite of his fear. "Tomorrow, Dar Littri is to retire from the throne, and the new governor, Gnoor Djoon, arrives. You know what they say about him. He is the devil's own brother. Mend your ways, Craig, if you want to live!"

After Paul had fled, Craig dug behind the wall. His thoughts were of Gnoor Djoon, a *Khri* dictator who had never visited the Earth before, but whose fame for cunning and ruthlessness had gone before him. From afar, on the home planet of the *Khri,* he had questioned Dar Littri's policies. He had announced that investigations would be made. Dar Littri had told this much to James Goodman, and the latter had passed it on to Paul and Craig and Marjorie. Even Amkhah, himself, was to be investigated!

Craig cursed. Perhaps time had run out. Maybe it was later than he had thought. Tonight might be his last chance to find what he had sought twice before and failed.

Somewhere down here was a buried suite of rooms which had comprised his father's private offices and research laboratory in those days when he had worked on the vortex. He knew that all the equations were not in his father's head. They were somewhere in here in buried files. And perhaps there was much more to be found—weapons of the old world, before the coming of the *Khri.* His father had been the leading scientist of the old Terrestrial Government. His laboratory had been the site of the latest basic de-

velopments. Deadly ray weapons—reaction type bombs. Anything might be found here—or nothing. And even if he found something, could he, alone, fathom its secret or make use of his discovery?

An overwhelming sense of futility was beginning to possess him—just as his pick broke through into emptiness. He paused, hardly daring to believe that he had found the secret place at last.

Then, suddenly, he began to pull plaster and debris away with a feverish haste, until he had made a hole large enough to crawl through. He reached for the flickering candelabra and thrust it into the chamber he had opened . . .

* * *

DAR LITTRI was neither discharged nor demoted in being replaced by Gnoor Djoon. The *Khri* had a life span of close to one thousand years, and it was their practice to consider the first half of their lives as years of work. After five hundred years of useful service to society they earned the right to indulge in studies or recreational activities of their own. In short, they retired at the expense of the government. Actually this was a good investment on the part of the *Khri* government, because a retiring *Khri* with five centuries of experience behind him was not only possessed of great knowledge and ability but was still young and vigorous enough to put it into use. Out of this retirement period of *Khri* life had come the super-technology which had enabled them to become the overlords of seven solar systems.

So it was that when Gnoor Djoon's official ship arrived out of interstellar space and landed in the palace grounds amidst all the pomp and ceremony that could be expected of a colonial outpost, Dar Littri began to think fondly of his retirement. He planned to remain on Earth and work with Goodman. During the fifteen years that he had known the terrestrial scientist he had become aware of certain hidden assets peculiar to him and to his species that were lacking in the *Khri,* and he had made a study of them. The proud society of his far home planet, many parsecs removed from this 'savage' outpost, could snicker if they pleased, but he knew what he was doing. Furthermore, he had found it beneficial to instruct Goodman in some of the most advanced technology of the *Khri,* with a specific purpose in mind. He had found that the Earthman's brilliant mind could make fresh approaches to old problems, and the result had been something very interesting indeed. Certain of their secret experiments had succeeded, and soon they would be ready for the greatest of them all. And then Goodman would enjoy the advantage he sought, and Dar Littri would possess something which no *Khri* had ever known or ever would know!

However, these beatific dreams were surprisingly disturbed by the

advent of Gnoor Djoon. The latter took charge of Earth on the first day of his arrival. His manner offended Dar Littri, who was far less a tenderfoot in governmental affairs than the new planetary governor—and he told him as much.

"You are a fool!" retorted Gnoor Djoon. "Just a doddering old philosopher whose mind has been stultified by the opiate of dreams!"

Gnoor Djoon was larger than Dar Littri. Vigorous and powerful, heavily bedecked with the jewel insignia of state, he exuded an air of haughty suspicion and belligerent aggressiveness. Dar Littri, however, was too rich in years to be overly concerned about his successor's personal ambitions or official opinions, but being a *Khri*, himself, he still took offense at the other's general attitude.

"What are you getting at?" he asked, sullenly.

Gnoor Djoon's three eyes darkened. "Bring your priests of Amkhah before me," he answered, "and I will tell you! Particularly this High Priest whom you have often referred to in your reports as James Marlowe Goodman."

"Goodman is the only Terrestrial you will want to speak to," replied Dar Littri, warily. "The rest know nothing."

"*That* is what I have the right to determine!" said Gnoor Djoon, emphatically. "Bring them to me!"

SO It was that Goodman, Burgess, Craig and Paul were brought before Gnoor Djoon in secret session. Marjorie was not admitted because she was not yet a priestess, and her rank in the ecclesiastical system of the temple was not as high as that of Craig and Paul, who were the two most important novitiates.

"In the first place," Gnoor Djoon said to them via the translator, "you will understand that I am questioning this whole policy of a synthetic religion for you Terrestrials. Some there are in the higher circles of *Khri* government who have applauded Dar Littri's idea as being a very clever one, but I and many others are of the opinion that all this is a waste of time. I think the fiction of Amkhah should be abolished and you humans should be more effectively subjugated. To me you are mere cattle—nothing more.

"But I am just. Before wiping out what Dar Littri has established, I am willing to listen to him and to you Earthmen, who I understand are the highest representatives of your species. I will begin this hearing by firing my major shot—and I'll let you try to answer my question if you can."

Gnoor Djoon looked at all of them from the elevation of his throne and seemed to be enjoying himself. Dar Littri sat at an equal level, but the Earthmen stood below. Of them all, perhaps Craig and his father were the most alert and on edge, for each possessed knowledge which was more precious than life, itself. In fact, if the elder Good-

man had suspected at that moment that Craig knew so much he would have been capable of dispatching his soul into the Neverness of the Ultimate Death . . .

"I have spent many months perusing almost every report Dar Littri has made," said Gnoor Djoon. "And from all that material I have extracted a few facts which escaped notice by other examiners, but which I consider to be of prime significance. I have said nothing to anyone. So tremendous were the implications that I decided to keep my suspicions to myself, merely to protect my own reputation. For no one would believe me unless I could present the facts. Now I am here before you—*and I want the facts!*"

Gnoor Djoon looked at Dar Littri. "My major shot is this: That you, Dar Littri, have been tricked by this Earthman, James Marlowe Goodman!"

While Goodman paled, visibly, as did his son, though unobserved by his father, Dar Littri appeared to swell with indignation.

"Explain yourself!" he demanded.

"I give the orders here now," retorted Gnoor Djoon, in his own language.

Dar Littri blazed at him in his rage. "You are insolent and insulting!" he answered "You'd better stop trying to be a thirty-day wonder, and explain yourself quickly, or I'll be pleased to return to headquarters and have you discharged within the year! I'll take none of your insults! Remember that!"

Gnoor Djoon sneered. "While you toy with your inconsequential dreams, you sit unsuspectingly upon an instrument of empire! I will prove it. Listen!" Whereupon he again addressed himself to the Earthmen, via the translator.

"When we made our final attack against your last stronghold, fifteen years ago," he said, "some of our ships were destroyed by a curious weapon, which has been referred to as the ether vortex. I understand that you, Goodman, invented it; furthermore, that you destroyed it so that it would not fall into our hands. And for good reason. That weapon penetrated our shields, which makes it a *very* important weapon in our minds, I assure you. Now, I understand that later on you recreated the ether vortex and that it now operates here in the main temple under the disguise of Amkhah, a fictitious god."

Goodman replied immediately. "That which responds to the sacred incantations in the temple of Amkhah is a veritable god. It is nameless and incomprehensible, omniscient and omnipotent. I discovered this ancient power quite by accident, in the course of my private researches into the nature of extra-dimensional energy sources. True, I called upon this terrible power in the last hour of desperation, willing to risk even my own soul to save my kind, but when I saw that I was too late I destroyed the gateway to this alien entity so that you might not tamper with it and perhaps un-

leash it entirely—which would mean utter extinction for all things in this plane of existence."

"And I say you are an unmitigated liar!" retorted Gnoor Djoon. "In the first place, the ether vortex may well be the most powerful weapon ever invented. Of course it was an accident, I will admit, that one of your inferior intelligence should have discovered it, but the fact remains that it is a terrific weapon, because we know what it takes to penetrate our shields even if you don't—and the vortex did just that, apparently with no effort. The *Khri* need further room for expansion in this galaxy, but there are other star empires that oppose us. I believe that with this ether vortex of yours we might wage successful war and one day be masters of the universe! I want that weapon, Goodman! You may have been able to trick Dar Littri, but you will not trick *me!* You told him it was an instrument of terror that would be more effective than the blood sacrifices, simply because you sought, naturally, to spare your kind the torture and pain of dying under the knife. The ether vortex was a painless euthanasia. This nonsense about an Ultimate Death and Man's duality and the supposed eternal life of a second ego called the soul is sheerest fiction—just the type of exotic voodooism that could be expected of a savage outpost such as this planet. You have capitalized on it very cleverly, but now I am calling a halt to it. Unless you give me the secret of the ether vortex, I shall reestablish the blood sacrifices!"

Goodman was paler than ever, but he stood his ground. "The ether vortex does not exist," he insisted. "Only Amkhah — the Ultimate Death. If you tamper with the powers of Amkhah, you and all your kind will be destroyed."

"Lies! Lies! All lies!" shouted Gnoor Djoon. "To prove it, I am going to read your mind, here and now!"

It was Craig's turn to be frightened. After last night's discovery in the temple, he knew full well what his father knew. And if Gnoor Djoon discovered *that,* it would be worse than the end of a world. Yet he took courage when he saw that his father was calm. Perhaps he knew things, after all, which Craig had not yet discovered!

When the translator had been adjusted to give voice to Goodman's thoughts, Gnoor Djoon again addressed the Earth scientist.

"What is the real truth about the ether vortex?" he asked him.

And the translator replied at it gave voice to Goodman's thoughts: *"The ether vortex does not exist. Only Amkhah—the Ultimate Death. If you tamper with the powers of Amkhah, you and all your kind will be destroyed."*

It was then that Craig knew another of his father's secrets, and he began to relax. But his relief was short-lived, because Gnoor Djoon, though possessed of an alien, inhu-

man intelligence, suddenly perceived the truth, however incredible a concept it was to one of his species.

"There you have another trick!" he exclaimed to Dar Littri, over the translator, so that the Earthmen would understand him. He did not know, as yet, that Goodman and Dar Littri had achieved successful telepathy years before and that the Earthman cauld have caught his thoughts without the translator. In fact, even Craig had found that he could receive the telepathic impulses of the *Khri,* although Paul and Marjorie could not.

"It must be true, then," Gnoor Djoon continued, that there *are* two components of the human ego. This terrestrial psychology concerning the conscious and the subconscious mind must be valid. And Goodman knows that the *Khri,* being only uniextant, cannot penetrate the human subconsciousness! What we read is only his conscious mind, on which he has imprinted, through self-hypnosis, that which he chooses to have us read. Now what do you say to *that*—Dar Littri?"

Then occurred that which filled Craig with amazement and alarm. Dar Littri began to speak in the thought language of the *Khri,* and he caught enough of it to understand that either his father was a traitor to his kind or such a clever genius as to surpass his and the *Khri's* understanding.

"All right," came Dar Littri's unshielded thought to Gnoor Djoon. He was trying to include Goodman, not realizing that Craig was also sensitive to his telepathy. "So you know our secret. You can appreciate my camouflage in view of the importance of this weapon. If it leaks out, the element of surprise may be lost. The ether vortex will be produced in effective quantity here on Earth before we present it to the military authorities. We must make enough of them to equip a hundred thousand warships. It will take many years, but it must be done. Then the warships will come here and be fitted out. They will make a rendezvous later, when they are all ready, probably along the belt of Orion, and from that well known strategic spot they will launch themselves on their journeys of galactic conquest. You are the only other intelligence, human or *Khri,* which shares this secret. Unless you work with me in strict secrecy, I will naturally have to kill you. Is that clear?"

"I reject your threat," returned Gnoor Djoon's thought. "You cannot threaten me, but you can trust me more than I prefer to trust you, until I have become more familiar with the facts. Has Goodman given you a complete set of plans for the weapon?"

"He is not ready yet, but he will be soon," came Dar Littri's reply.

"Not ready! Who is he to keep a *Khri* waiting for anything!"

"He is the inventor of the ether vortex," replied Dar Littri. "And there is much more that I will not tell even you, unless you prove that

you are worthy of sharing a secret greater than our kind has ever known."

"What secret could possibly transcend the importance of a weapon of ultimate conquest?"

"Something that transcends conquest, itself."

"And what is that?"

"That is *my* secret. But I am working with Goodman in my own way. The ether vortex will be ours very shortly if you will be patient."

CRAIG went away from that amazing session with momentous questions burning in his mind. First, was his father merely playing desperately for time, or did he really intend to give Dar Littri the secret of the vortex? This, he knew, he would risk his life to prevent, without question or hesitation. And he had to know the truth about it. On the other hand, was Dar Littri playing into his father's hands? Was that three-eyed monstrosity becoming philanthropic in his middle age? Craig could not believe it. It was true what Gnoor Djoon had admitted. The *Khri* were uni-extant. They possessed no duality. They were utterly materialistic, which had perhaps given them a superior development of the physical brain, or conscious mind. But there was no room in them for understanding or trust. No. He rejected the possibility of Dar Littri's conversion to the cause of Humanity. Either his father was a monstrous replica of Benedict Arnold, or he was a true saint, still working for human salvation.

What led him to fear that his father might possibly have revealed too much was Dar Littri allusion to a secret that transcended the importance of conquest, itself, which was an important subject to a race of cold-blooded creatures sprawling across seven solar systems in their multi-billions of numbers and enjoying a life span of a thousand years. He hoped against hope that the ultimate secret of Man—which did transcend by far the importance of the vortex as a weapon—was still Man's exclusive property. It was a mind-staggering secret that he had discovered in the cellar of the temple. Not even his mother or Anne Burgess or even old man Burgess, himself, had suspected it. All they knew was that Amkhah was not a god, and that the Ultimate Death was nothing but the ether vortex—a weapon that should never fall into the hands of the *Khri*. They suspected also that in the old rooms of the laboratory under the temple were Goodman's secret papers, which revealed how to build the vortex. Craig had found those papers, but in them he had also discovered that which none of the others could have suspected. In that greatest of *all* secrets he had seen his father's utterly ingenious and unprecedented plan for Man's salvation.

But in view of present circumstances he was beginning to wonder if his father could possibly be hav-

ing a change of heart. He had to know, for while the ultimate secret remained the property of Man, Craig would consider his father as a living saint. If he accepted some tempting bribe on the part of Dar Littri, however, and sold the *Khri* the ether vortex, it would be equivalent to giving them *the* secret—the saving secret of his kind—and in that case Craig was already prepared. He would kill his father and destroy even Amkhah, himself . . .

* * *

THAT day, Paul Goodman called a conference between himself and Craig and Marjorie. It was after the noon services to Amkhah, in one of the temple chambers devoted to meditation.

"What is going on?" Paul demanded. "At the session this morning before Gnoor Djoon, I could only gather that Amkhah is being questioned. I know that you are sensitive to *Khri* telepathy, Craig, and that you must have caught some of the secret conversation that went on between Gnoor Djoon and Dar Littri. Now what did they say?"

Craig knew his brother was a fanatic who believed in the entity and the power of Amkhah. Yet he needed his help. If he were to explain the truth, however, Paul might refuse to believe it, and he might do something rash to precipitate a catastrophe upon them all. So he decided to turn the other's fanaticism to good advantage.

"I was wrong," he lied, "in assuming that dad had created Amkhah. I have learned since that Amkhah is in actuality an entity of incomprehensible power, as you have always believed. However, it seems that dad may reveal to the *Khri* the method of utilizing the power of this god, themselves. They hope to use the Ultimate Death as an instrument of conquest!"

Paul and Marjorie both raised their brows in an expression of alarm.

"But if that happens," Paul said, Amkhah might be angered! He might get out of control and kill us all—destroy the whole world!"

"That's a possibility I have considered," Craig replied. "Now I may be wrong. Maybe dad is just playing for time. He may have something else in mind. If he does plan to give the secret to the *Khri,* it is my plan to destroy the temple and the gateway to Amkhah, himself, so that he may never be called forth again."

"But dad could call Amkhah into being elsewhere!" protested Paul.

"Not if he is killed, as he would deserve to be in such case. But even if he should escape me, he could not do what you say. The key to the power is not all in his mind. Much of what he needs is on paper, representing many years of work. And I have those papers."

Both of his listeners' mouths dropped agape.

"Where?" asked Paul.

"They are no longer in the cellar

of the temple, so don't bother to look for them there. Their location is my secret. But there is something else down there, and that is a secret I must share with you, Paul, because I need your help."

"And what is that?"

"First, do you agree that Amkhah is sacred and that it would be catastrophic to allow his wrath to be awakened?"

Paul's eyes lighted with fanaticism. "I do!" he exclaimed.

"Do you agree that the gateway to his dark world should be destroyed rather than let its secret fall into the hands of the *Khri?*"

"Yes! Absolutely!"

"Then if something should happen to me at the last moment, you should be able to take over for me and accomplish just that. I want to show you how it can be done." He braced himself now. He had to put over another deliberate lie. If he succeeded, then the major outlines of his strategy would be established.

"There is one thing I have decided," he said, "in the event that the road to Amkhah is to be destroyed. Such action on our part will deny the *Khri* access to the terrible power of the Ultimate Death, but once we do this thing, if or when it is found to be necessary, life here for us would be worse than death—if they allowed us to live for even an instant. The weapon I am going to show you was once called a reaction pile. It works like a time bomb, and when it goes off it is capable of destroying everything including the palace and most of the surrounding countryside. Dad rigged it up one time with a timer on it. He evidently planned to destroy his lab to hide its secrets if he found it necessary to do so, but was taken by surprise by the *Khri* invasion and never had a chance to turn it on. Later, when he needed the lab to reconstruct the gateway to Amkhah, he also thought better of destroying the place. But the thing is down there and I know how to turn it on and just how much time it would leave us before it went off. Now, the reason I want to utilize this time-bomb is to give us time to yield *ourselves* to Amkhah before access is closed to him forever."

Marjorie and Paul both blanched, terrified.

"Yield ourselves to Ahkhah!" exclaimed Paul. "But he is the Ultimate Death! Only the rebellious ones and the disbelievers have been sent to *him!* We are his faithful servants! Why should *we—*"

"Wait!" Craig interrupted. Now came the trickiest part of his lie. He swallowed hard and began. "You must believe me when I say that I have new and astounding secret knowledge. Dad always knew it, but he doesn't know that *I* know it. I have learned that the true servants of Amkhah are spared the Ultimate Death. The rebellious ones, to be punished, may be snuffed out forever, yes. But those who have the faith to enter voluntarily

into his embrace are taken into his own world, which is an eternal Paradise."

Marjorie's eyes narrowed thoughtfully. "Craig," she said, "is this really true? It is too incredible! How could you know of this?"

Craig looked at her steadily. He had to put it over, lie or no lie. "You must believe me, if you love me," he said.

Tears came to her eyes and she threw herself into his arms. "Oh I *do* love you!" she exclaimed. "But all this is such a nightmare! I'm so confused, darling!"

Paul slumped, visibly. He looked at the two, dejectedly. Craig grasped his brother's wrist, sympathetically.

"Yes, Paul," he said. "Marjorie is mine, now. It had to be one way or the other. I'm sorry."

Marjorie dried her eyes and looked at Paul, a sad, confused smile on her lips. But Paul looked away.

There was a long silence, and then he said, "There isn't much left to life, one way or another. Even the Ultimate Death would be a welcome escape from everything. But tell me, Craig. If what you claim is true concerning this secret reward of Paradise to the faithful servants of Amkhah, why not go right away into his arms? That's a good way out for all of us. If you believe what you say, why don't you go to Amkhah?"

"Because," Craig replied, "none of us may take that reward without first determining that the road to Amkhah will never be open to the *Khri!*"

GNOOR DJOON, having uncovered the amazing facts he now possessed, was highly impatient for results. He made further investigations which aroused new suspicions, and finally he called Dar Littri to him.

"You and the Earthman delay too long," he said. "You are up to something that I don't like. Either you already have the secret of the vortex, or you are working out something more potent. Unfortunately, we *Khri* can lock our minds shut to each other, so I can't probe you that way. But I am informing you here and now that I will not be tricked by either of you! My mind is made up. I know that the machinery of the vortex is in the temple, because it is utilized there to create this so-called 'god power'. If you don't take it over and have it analyzed, I will! In fact, why haven't you done this long ago?"

"Naturally I have analyzed it," replied Dar Littri. "But this Goodman is a true genius. His vortex is an extremely intricate machine. Its adjustments and inter-balanced electrical circuits and their varying impedances are so fluid that no one could either duplicate them or operate the machine without a precise table of key computations. The key to the operating technique is locked in the subconsciousness of the Earthman's mind, which you know is inaccessible to us. The computa-

tions relative to the actual construction of the machine are not in his mind at all, because they reflect many years of empirical knowledge gained from original experiments. I believe he has those computations down somewhere on paper."

"Then why haven't you *forced* the whole secret out of him!"

"I have found," said Dar Littri, calmly, "that there is much to be gained by bargaining with Goodman."

"You are a worse fool than I thought!" exploded Gnoor Djoon. "What bargain could you possibly make with such an inferior creature?"

"*That* is my personal secret," said Dar Littri.

"Then my mind is made up!" retorted Gnoor Djoon. "You may deliver this ultimatum to Goodman. Either he will give us his secret—*today*—or tomorrow his own sons will be forced to sacrifice him to Amkhah! He must cooperate with us at once—or become the victim of his own creation, the Ultimate Death! I have spoken! There can be no question about it! Now go!"

Dar Littri's reptilian body exhibited a storm of colors which deepened swiftly into sheer black. "*You* are the fool!" he exclaimed. "But I'll carry out your orders—to the letter!"

WHEN Goodman received the ultimatum, he was visibly staggered by it. He and Dar Littri went into a secret conference that lasted for more than an hour. Then Goodman called Craig and Paul and Marjorie and Burgess to him and apprized them, in part, of what had happened.

"I am to open the road to Amkhah for Gnoor Djoon, so that he may use the secret power as a means of conquest," he explained. "If I do not agree to do this, you, Paul and Craig, are to offer me into the arms of Amkhah. Evidently Gnoor Djoon thinks that he can discover the secret of calling forth the god after I am gone—but he is wrong. Furthermore, I have decided not to yield this secret. That is why it will be necessary for you to carry out his orders tomorrow. It will be your duty to sacrifice me to Amkhah."

To his surprise, Paul and Craig and Marjorie did not recoil at the idea as he had expected. Burgess, of course, was irresponsive. He had been out of his mind ever since the day he saw his wife and Flora consumed by what he knew to be the ether vortex.

Paul, however, sought to explain. "You need hide your secret from us no longer, dad," he said. He felt Craig's warning grip on his arm, but he resisted him. "Why not tell him we know?" he asked, turning to Craig. But in Craig's eyes he saw a look of death, and he suddenly fell silent.

Goodman reached out and gripped Paul by his priest's tunic. "What secret do you know?" he demanded,

while Dar Littri loomed behind him, unable to comprehend their speech but endeavoring to catch their thoughts.

"I guess—I'd better not—" Paul stammered suddenly aware that he had made some fatal mistake.

"Tell me!" Goodman insisted, shaking him.

"Well, that the Ultimate Death is only for the disbelievers and the trouble makers," Paul blurted out. "For the faithful—Amkhah reserves a secret Paradise."

Goodman's eyes widened while his face clouded swiftly. He glared so frighteningly at Craig that Marjorie cringed behind him. Then he looked again at Paul.

"Who ever told you such a thing?" he demanded to know. Then he thought of Dar Littri behind him and he swiftly made his conscious mind do something so difficult that the effort made him stagger. He closed his eyes and shook his head. "Of course what you say is true," he said, recovering quickly. "But you startled me. You must never divulge this secret to anyone, as it is sacred knowledge reserved only for the High Priests. Tomorrow when you sacrifice me to Amkhah, you may rest assured that I will escape the Ultimate Death."

But Craig caught something that Paul and Marjorie did not. He caught the swift, telepathic exchange of thoughts between Dar Littri and his father.

"So there is yet another secret," came Dar Littri's accusation. I thought I could trust you, but maybe Gnoor Djoon is right about you!"

"It is the ultimate secret of my kind," was Goodman's mental reply. "You'll get it when our experiment is completed—tonight!"

"I'd *better* get it!" warned Dar Littri, wrathfully.

"You will," came Goodman's thought. "After tonight, what could either of us *ever* hide?"

Craig's lips tightened but he gave no other sign that he had caught on. He looked away from his father: So he is a traitor, after all. He is willing to give Dar Littri the secret of human salvation. For that I'll be glad to sacrifice him to his false god—and let Paradise take care of his soul!

THAT night, Dar Littri and Goodman retired to the *Khri's* private laboratory. And in the meantime, Craig briefed Marjorie and Paul on what they would have to do on the following day. But first he had a bone to pick with his brother.

"You were a fool," he said, "to reveal to dad what I told you. You may have ruined eveqrything!"

"I can't see why," retorted Paul. "I only wanted him to know that we—"

"Never mind!" Craig interrupted, glaring at him. "Unless you do exactly what I tell you to do, you're going to be sorry. Now listen to me carefully!"

Whereupon he outlined each step they would have to follow. And all the while there was a new thought that tormented him. He could not help remembering his father's cryptic thought message to Dar Littri: *"After tonight, what could either of us ever hide?"*

There was a shadowy threat in that sentence that filled Craig with a nameless foreboding. He was grim as he drove home his last point to Paul and Marjorie.

"Then we are agreed," he said. "Tomorrow, before the sacrifice, I will set the reactor timer. When dad goes into the arms of Amkhah, we follow. And a few minutes later the whole place will be blown to atoms, so that the *Khri* will never have access to the secret of the god power."

The other two stared at him, frightened.

"Is it agreed?" he almost shouted at them.

"Yes," said Marjorie, barely above a whisper. "If you say so, Craig. Where you lead, I will follow."

"Good! And what about you, Paul? Have you lost your great faith in Amkhah?"

"No, Craig," Paul replied. Cold sweat was visible on his forehead. "I — I only want to be sure about—"

"About life beyond? You need not fear if you believe. For unbelievers there is only the Ultimate Death . . ."

* * *

IT was not until almost time for the sacrifice next day that Craig noticed the absence of old Burgess. No one else was overly concerned about it, but it gave Craig strange food for thought as he prepared the temple for the ceremony.

Early that morning he had succeeded in setting the timer and two deadly elements began to wage a silent battle. He walled the entire unit up in its vault deep beneath the temple and came upstairs with a strange sense of relief. The die was cast. There were no more uncertainties. The daring adventure had begun at last.

Gnoor Djoon and many of the members of his court arrived at the temple at eleven thirty. Some fifteen minutes were expended in getting everybody in their places in the main temple before the brazen, triple-headed image of Amkhah. The lights were dimmed, and the great idol loomed enigmatically before the great cavern where the shadow of the god was to be summoned forth.

Just as Gnoor Djoon was about to question Paul and Craig concerning the whereabouts of their father, he appeared. But he was not in a condition which anyone might have expected to see him in.

He was apparently so drunk that he could hardly stand on his feet. Dar Littri brought him. To everyone's surprise, he treated Goodman with very little consideration. In fact, he dragged him to the feet of the startled young novitiates of Amkhah. And without a sound he

strutted across the chamber to take his place beside Gnoor Djoon.

"I have learned that your own plan is the best one," he told the latter. "The Earthman cannot be trusted. We'll get the secret of the vortex after he has gone."

Gnoor Djoon was noncommittal. He only surveyed Dar Littri with a studious deliberation. The latter's strange air of triumph and conviction aroused vague suspicions in him, and he became irritable.

"Well, let's be done with it, then," he said, at last. "Tell them to get on with the sacrifice if Goodman refuses to give up his secret." He fingered a lethal *Khri* beam vibrator under cover of one of his great wings.

"The vortex is set by Goodman's own timing devices," Dar Littri explained. "It is activated each day at precisely twelve o'clock. That means we have just a few more minutes to wait."

In the meantime, Marjorie helped Paul and Craig prepare Goodman for the sacrifice. They had to undress him and wrap his body in a white sheet and place it on a thin concrete slab that would be carried with him into the arms of Amkhah.

"Something is wrong," Paul whispered to Craig and Marjorie. "Dad never drank before. Why should he be drunk now? Is he afraid? Tell me, Craig!" Paul's voice rose above a whisper, and Craig noticed that he was trembling with fear. "Tell me!" he exclaimed. "If our own father has no faith in Amkhah, then I'd rather stay and take the explosion!"

"Shut up, you fool!" Craig hissed. "If anyone hears you the whole plan may fail!"

"Craig, I'm terribly afraid!" Marjorie said to him, trying not to become hysterical.

"Trust me!" Craig insisted. "If you don't know what you're doing, I do!"

"Amkhah!' sighed Goodman, in his stupor.

"Dad!" Craig whispered to him. "Do you hear me?"

"Marjorie," said Goodman. His bloodshot eyes were half open, and his hand reached out to Burgess' daughter. "Good girl!" he said. "Amkhah won't hurt me."

"Why!" exclaimed Marjorie, desperately. "Why won't Amkhah hurt?"

"Ultimate Death," he answered faintly. "Darkness — no pain at all."

"There! You see!" Paul exclaimed. "There *is* no promised Paradise! Amkhah *is* the Ultimate Death! Take the bomb, Craig! That way there is supposed to be a Hereafter, at least according to the old religion of our fathers!"

Craig glared at his brother in disgust. "And you were the fanatical believer in our dark god!" he said. "Listen to me! I know what I'm talking about! If dad had not believed in the secret reward of Amkhah, would he have callously sent mother into the shadow, and Anne Burgess?"

Paul and Marjorie stared at Craig,

momentarily considering this new idea.

Then Paul said, swiftly, "But mother and Anne Burgess were unbelievers!"

"Oh forget all that rubbish!" he said. "Now I *am* telling you the truth! Dad has known all along that—"

He was interrupted by the somber reverberations resulting from a brass gong. It was high noon, and the shadow of Amkhah had begun to form in the great cavern behind the idol!

Paul and Marjorie straightened up and looked at each other. Then they looked in back of them, behind the towering idol that was already beginning to move to one side. There in the cavern the normal darkness was growing deeper, giving way to a nameless force that filled them with instinctive dread.

But Craig was not looking at Amkhah. He had been examining his father's body very carefully, trying to put many curious facts together —his cryptic thought message to Dar Littri concerning a mysterious experiment, his drunkenness now, the disappearance of Burgess, and Dar Littri's air of triumph. He straightened up slowly and stared Dar Littri in the two of his three eyes that were turned toward him.

Suddenly, he felt in his belt, under his priest's robes, to make sure that a certain precious package was still there. And he felt better.

But then Dar Littri's great eyes suddenly glowered at him. He was suspicious of something, perhaps reading something in Craig's mind even at that distance.

He turned to Gnoor Djoon and said, "They hesitate. Have I your permission to force them to get on with it?"

Gnoor Djoon was still alert to treachery, but he said, "Yes! I'll cover you in case they try anything they shouldn't." And he made it a point to show Dar Littri his weapon of death.

The other *Khri* spectators sat back in their seats, immensely enjoying themselves. The spectacle might prove entertaining, after all, they thought. However, had they been aware of the increasing hard radiations, deep below them, under the temple, their elation would have been rudely dissipated . . .

DAR LITTRI half fluttered across the floor of the temple and settled down beside Craig.

"Get on with it!" he thought, suspecting now that perhaps the young Earthman had been able to read him all along.

"Yes, I'll get on with it," came Craig's thought. "I'll send my father's body into the vortex, but before I do I'd like to have you answer one question."

"And that is?"

*"Where is my father?"*

Craig's eyes glared steadily into Dar Littri's.

"Then you know," came Dar Littri's reply.

"Partly. I know that Burgess

must be dead. You performed some kind of devilish experiment last night, and Burgess' poor, cracked mind is the only thing that animates my father's body now. Therefore, I'm asking you—where is the entity, the mind and soul of James Goodman?"

Dar Littri made his queer, chucking sound. "You are clever," he replied, "so I will tell you. Or rather, I'll let your father tell you."

"My father!"

*"Yes, son, I am here,"* came Goodman's thought.

"But where!"

*"Here!* Dar Littri and I — are *one!"*

The *Khri* spectators, as well as Paul and Marjorie, were startled to see Craig put an arm across his face and stagger back from Dar Littri as though he had been struck.

"Yes, Craig, it is true," came Goodman's thought. The thought came waveringly, as though delivered with an effort from a great distance. "Dar Littri and I perfected a method of transferring the imperishable constituent of human egos from one body to another. The *Khri* are soulless. Therefore, Dar Littri has bargained with me and I have accepted. I am now a part of him, as he is a part of me. As such we shall continue together in mortality another five hundred years or so. I shall give him the vortex, and we shall enter upon a course of interstellar conquest the like of which the universe has never known. In the meantime, our egos will gradually blend into one, and when this *Khri* dies, he will have what no other *Khri* before him ever had—the immortality of a soul! He alone, of all his kind, will continue in the next plane of existence!"

"You're both mad!" retorted Craig.

"No, Craig," came his father's thought. "It is the greatest stroke of genius ever conceived!"

Craig activated the driving mechanism under the slab on which Goodman's body lay, and it began to move in a prescribed channel toward the darkness of Amkhah. He dispensed with the incantations, as did Paul. He backed slowly away from Dar Littri, back toward the Shadow, along with the body of his father. And Paul and Marjorie followed, timorously, unaware of the incredible conversation that was being carried on, yet sensing that Craig was not to be interrupted. Slowly, Dar Littri followed them.

"But your plan is not completely conceived," came Craig's thought. "I perceive, in the revelation of your present dual identity, that you intend to destroy me, because obviously you would trust no one with such a secret and permit him to live. However, you are not going to have that chance!"

"What makes you think so?" came Dar Littri's thought now. And the *Khri's* taloned fingers began to reach out toward him.

They were very close to the shadow of Amkhah now, but they were slowing down. The slab, how-

ever, with the body of Goodman, continued into the awful darkness. Wide-eyed, Paul and Marjorie watched it enter the influence of the titanic power that raged there in the deep silence of the Unknown. And as they saw the slab and the body dissolve into nothingness, Paul stopped in his tracks and Marjorie screamed.

"Oh Craig!" she cried out. "Forgive me, but I can't! I can't!"

Craig leaped across the shallow channel and grasped her wrist, even as Dar Littri approached. He held her firmly.

"If you can't believe me, then die with me!" he hissed. "Follow me!"

She looked fearfully at Dar Littri, then into the looming darkness ahead. Step by faltering step, she yielded, accompanying Craig into what her instincts told her was the Ultimate Death—the negation of Immortality.

Craig pulled a cylinder out of his belt and waved it before Dar Littri. "Stand back!" came his thought. "Or you will lose everything! In here is the entire destiny of your dreamed of universal empire—your secret papers concerning the vortex! Come one step nearer, and I'll throw them into it!"

Still he backed ever closer to the fringe of extinction, while Paul hung back, shaking with fright, now utterly devoid of all his fanatic faith.

"With time—I can reestablish my computations—" came Goodman's faint thoughts, now strangely more laborious than ever. "By an examination — of the present machine!"

"No, you can't! Because in a few minutes it will be destroyed!"

Dar Littri tensed visibly. He stopped.

"By what!" came the *Khri's* own thought.

"By my father's own reaction pile, down below in the old laboratory. It's far too late to shut it off, because it's about to blow up! *Now* what do you think of your stinking plan of conquest!"

Whereupon Craig pulled Marjorie after him, and she suddenly yielded, with wide eyes staring into the bottomless darkness. Before Dar Littri could grasp them, they were plucked away into nothingness . . .

* * *

WHEN Craig and Marjorie opened their eyes, they found themselves surrounded by many people that they knew. Craig recognized Dr. Jules Minet, a man who had been sacrificed to Amkhah only two days before. Minet had been a great physicist in his time, but among the slave compounds under the *Khri* he had been guilty of stirring up the spirit of rebellion. As a matter of fact, Craig thought dimly—unaware of just where he was—most of the victims of the "Ultimate Death" had been just the kind of people who should never die—men and women of wisdom and

ability, the cream of Humanity.

He saw standing next to Dr. Minet another man he knew—Dr. Charles Rankin, once a world famous physician and surgeon, eminent author of many a basic text on medicine. And there was Andrew Stebbins, a former civil engineer, and last but not least, Flora, his own mother, and Anne Burgess, both of them looking a little older than when he had last seen them, but glowing with health. Everyone was smiling at him and Marjorie, and many were bending over the body of James Goodman.

"Thank God!" he heard someone say. "Goodman has arrived at last!"

A great cheer went up from hundreds of men, women and children who were gathered there. "The Saint! The Saint!" they shouted. "He is with us!" There was such reverence and love in their voices that Craig was forced to sit up and look about him in amazement.

He saw a great multitude of people covering a vast, red swarded slope that was half covered with impossibly beautiful wild flowers. Their beauty was impossible, he thought, because they contained iridescent colors which had never been seen on Earth, and they exuded a perfume that caused his brain to tingle.

Beyond the red sward and the wild flowers and the multitude of shouting people, Craig and Marjorie both saw a plain on which were the rustic wooden buildings of a pioneer city. It was a fertile, cultivated plain that swept away in a breath-taking panorama to a distant seashore. The ocean there was of a cobalt blue that almost hurt their eyes. The sky above was bluish green, striated with a coppery yellow haze. Two bluish green suns dominated the firmament.

By this time, Marjorie was sobbing in her mother's arms, and Flora held her son close to her and thanked God for his safety.

Marjorie stretched her hand out to Craig. "You were right!" she cried, happily, through her tears. "Amkhah is not the Ultimate Death! He has taken us to Paradise!"

"No," said Craig. "This is not Paradise. It is merely another physical plane of existence. That's the secret I found in my father's papers."

"Then you knew more than we did!" exclaimed Flora, looking proudly at her son. And Dr. Minet and other scientists crowded close to hear.

Craig hugged his mother. "You were very brave," he said. "You and Anne Burgess thought that the ether vortex was some kind of death. You didn't know it was a gateway into another dimension, or interlocked plane, as dad called it. But even before I found the proof, I suspected that dad was sending all of you into a place like this. That's why he couldn't use the vortex on the *Khri*. He didn't want *them* to populate this world! He was reserving it for us!"

"And that is why," said Dr. Min-

et, "he insisted on building the main temple of Amkhah at the site of his original experiments in Arizona. He wanted to be sure we would come out here and not somewhere else!"

Craig remembered, however, that his father had had a change of heart. His cosmic perspective had burned out his taste for righteousness because it had been too big a perspective for finite Man to possess. When Craig had last talked with the entity that was his father, in the body of Dar Littri, he had perceived that this erstwhile saviour of Mankind had decided to betray them, after all, by giving the secret of the vortex to the *Khri*.

And here were all these people, many of them on their knees, worshipping the prostrate form of Goodman, not knowing that that body was but a shell for the crippled mind and spirit of Harold Burgess. Craig turned from his mother to look at his father's body.

"How is he?" he asked Dr. Rankin, who had been working on him.

"He is dead," he said sadly. "It looks as though someone has poisoned him."

"Poisoned!" Craig exclaimed. "And we thought he was drunk!" He saw now that his father had planned this well. No one in the new world was to know his terrible secret.

Flora Goodman smiled sadly. "It is still a blessing," she said, "that he is here. Now we can erect a great tomb for him and give him the veneration he deserves." She looked back at Craig. "Oh son!" she exclaimed, happily. "You should be proud of your father! His heroic example will be an inspiration for generations to come, as we raise our children's children in the faith in Man's humanity to Man. James Marlowe Goodman will remain forever as the symbol of bravery, chivalry and heroism! He was Earth's ultimate saint!"

Craig remained silent. He was looking at the faces of young children gathered nearby—the children who had been born here in the new world. Those faces were flushed with adoration—their eyes bright with trust and faith. How could he tell them the truth? He knew he never would.

"What about Paul?" his mother asked him. "Is he safe?"

Craig's brow suddenly furrowed with concern. He looked at Marjorie, frightened.

"Paul didn't come through!" exclaimed the girl. "He lost his faith in Amkhah. He stayed behind—to take death the other way!"

"Pray God he didn't find some way to turn off the timer!" Craig said, now tense with alarm.

"What timer?" asked Dr. Minet. "What are you talking about?"

"I had set a timing device in operation, attached to a reaction pile in dad's old laboratory. It was to blow up the temple and destroy the vortex so that the *Khri* would never find their way here. If Paul found some way to turn off the timer and stop the explosion, or if Dar

Littri or Gnoor Djoon succeeded in reading his mind and turned it off themselves, the *Khri* might—"

"But they wouldn't dare come here, even if they knew!" said Flora. "How could they get *back!*"

Craig remembered, to his horror, that his father had evidently once been here and returned. He alone knew the secret of returning through the vortex! But how could he tell his friends here, who believed they were about to bury Goodman, their saint and saviour, that the real Goodman was the greatest traitor of all times—that even now he lived in the body of a—

Just then, Marjorie screamed, and a great cry of fear arose from a hundred human beings around him. He looked up, following their eyes, and saw that which he had dreaded most.

Through the sky of their bright, new world swept the grotesque shape of a flying reptile—none other than Dar Littri, himself! He had come through!

Craig tensed, feeling for the cylinder in his belt. It was still there. And he knew that Dar Littri and James Goodman had come through the vortex for the papers.

Then another thought struck him. Or had the monster taken the risk of the vortex as the only road of escape from the reaction pile?

*The pile!* His eyes widened in horror as he noticed the frantic haste of the *Khri* flying above them.

"Everybody!" he yelled. "Flat on your faces! Quick!"

In the same instant, Dr. Minet realized their danger, and he frantically gave the same order. No sooner had they flattened themselves than the ground seemed to fly into the sky. Some of them were temporarily deafened by the backwash of the explosion as some of the shock wave was transmitted through the vortex.

Along with the muffled blast came telltale debris—bits of broken tubes and torn coils and twisted condensers—all that was left of the last ether vortex generator in existence . .

CRAIG was exhausted. He had been climbing mountains for days. Hundreds of men had been climbing mountains for days. Their cross-bows had wounded Dar Littri when he had tried to attack to claim the secret papers which Craig had already burned.

The *Khri* had retreated, mortally wounded, into the wilderness of the mountains—and all able bodied men of the new world had followed. This morning Craig had sighted the monster. He had seen him crawling weakly into a high, rocky crevice, and he had been trying to reach the place for hours.

Now he stood at the entrance. It was above the timber line. The air was cold and the wind had already raised a burn on his forehead and face. He panted heavily, but his hands gripped his cross-bow with dogged determination, and in his eyes was the threat and the promise

of death.

Slowly, he advanced upward among the rocks and shadows of the gigantic crevice, every sense painfully alert. He knew that until they were all sure that the *Khri*, with his malignant, alien intelligence, had died there could be no hope for their clean, new world. He—especially—knew this to be a fact.

Suddenly, there came into his mind an alien thought.

"I am here," came Dar Littri's telepathic message. "I am done."

The thought impulse of the dying *Khri* guided Craig, and he found the winged reptile lying between two large boulders. Craig stood on top of the boulders, cross-bow in hand, and looked down upon him. The alien creature lay panting in the throes of death, like some obnoxious dragon out of an ancient legend, his heaving thorax bleeding profusely from four deeply imbedded arrows.

"Dad," thought Craig. "Are you still there?"

For almost a minute the wounded *Khri* lay looking up at the human. Then he sent out his last thought.

"Your father's ego did not survive. There was some missing factor in our experiment. It did not succeed. In Burgess' case, it was a success, because his ego was transferred to another human, but we poisoned him. Yet he died a human death. In your father's case—something else happened. He began to die within me when you went through the vortex. I think he was still with me when I came through—but he has just—died . . ."

Dar Littri's great, reptilian head suddenly fell back against the rocks, and a peculiar glaze appeared over his three bulging eyes. And Craig knew he was dead at last. Their new world was safe.

THE END

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# The SOARING STATUE

*By L. Sprague de Camp*

**The statue was tremendous, and carved from one solid block of stone. None of the present tribes of Mars could have placed it there. Who, then?**

THE battle of Khye was decided by Semapova's charge. That young Tshimvian, scorning to obey his uncle's orders to slink in a wide detour to raid the Znaci baggage, led his tribe's light cavalry in a long uphill mass charge against the main array of the Znaci. The Znaci crossbowmen, standing four deep, piled their unarmored assailants in heaps, while the Znaci gunners, armed with weapons bought or stolen from the earthmen of Sveho, added to the confusion more by the noise of their weapons than by the accuracy of their fire.

Semapova reached the Znaci line alone, to fall with a Znaci pike through him and several crossbow-bolts sticking in his feathery pelt. The surviving Tshimvi riders fled. Soon thereafter Horko, the Znaci chief, rode up on his vaciza and tossed Semapova's head into the ranks of the Tshimvi.

The Tshimvi were at a disadvantage in trying to fight and move their entire tribe at the same time. Crafty old Zhewha (or more accurately Zhe3a, the numeral representing a whistle) had planned to hold off the Znaci by feints and raids until his noncombatants were safely through Khye Pass, but Semapova's folly ruined his plan.

The arrival of frantic fugitives from the charge shook the Tshimvi. Then at the onset of the Znaci they dissolved into a disordered mass of soldiery afoot and mounted, noncombatants, and beasts of burden, all trying to jam through the pass at once. The Znaci plowed into them, smiting all regardless of age or sex. The sun (that is, 61 Cygni A) went down on a scene of sanguinary carnage: bodies, severed members, dead vacizas, weapons, battle-standards, trumpets, drums, and all the other paraphernalia of barbarian war lying in tangled heaps and soaked with bright-blue blood.

With darkness, Zhewha slipped away with a few Tshimvi and spent the night rounding up survivors, though more than half of his nation had perished. Horko might have pressed the pursuit more closely had not another matter distracted his attention.

*Illustration by W. E. Terry*

The baggage-train of the Tshimvi included a litter slung between a pair of vacizas in tandem. This conveyance, like all the others, got jammed in the panic-push into the pass so that the vacizas could do nothing but claw and peck. Horko, blood masking the glitter of his gilded scale-armor, rode up and abated even this activity by striking off the head of the leading vaciza with the sickle-like reverse-curved sword of his people. The fact that he was merely destroying valuable property would not have deterred him in his battle-madness.

As the vaciza collapsed, two smallish figures leaped out of the litter on the far side and tried to battle their way through the jam afoot. Horko recognized them as earthmen. One of his soldiers drove his mount around the litter to get at them, cutting down a female Tshimvi in his way. As the soldier got within reach of the earthmen, the larger of the two pulled out a small one-hand gun and shot the soldier.

Meanwhile two other Znaci had pushed to within reach of the earthmen from other angles. He whirled and shot one of these, but before he could shift his attention again the other hewed off his gun-arm and then his head. The remaining warrior turned his attention to the other earthman, who seemed unarmed. Before he could strike, Horko shouted:

"Give back! Take it alive!"

He had to repeat the command before it penetrated the blood-maddened mind of the fighter. But Horko was known as a chief not to be trifled with, and at last the other earthman was seized unharmed. Horko dimounted and approached the creature, which like most of its kind was covered with artificial fabrics so that Horko could not perceive its sex. He wiped and sheathed his sword, gripped the fabric in his clawed hands, and ripped.

"A female!" he said. He had never seen one of that sex so far from Sveho. He spoke to it in trade-pidgin:

"Who you?"

The earthman was leaking at the eyes in the curious way the things did under stress of emotion. When it ceased its snuffling noises it replied in the mixture of Anglo-Terran and several Kteremian languages by which earthmen communicated with natives of the planet:

"Me female belong Chief Holm."

"Chief belong Sveho?" said Horko, cocking his head with interest.

"Yes. You hurt me, Chief Holm kill all Znaci."

If Horko had known how, he might have smiled. This capture opened up a new, and very interesting, line of thought. He indicated the remains of the male earthman:

"Who that?"

"Ivan Dolgoruki. Trader."

Horko told the warriors holding the surviving earthman: "Bring it along." He picked up the pistol and ammunition of the late I. Dolgoruki

but paid no further attention to the corpse.

* * *

AMAURY Brisson sat in the Northern Cross drowning his sorrows and pouring his troubles into the ears of a fellow-savant named Iflatun Faruq. Brisson was a man of slightly below average height and inclined to plumpness, with thinning light hair, a toothbrush mustache, and a pair of heavy-rimmed glasses that gave him the look of an indignant owl.

" . . . so what the hell can I do?" said Brisson, almost upsetting his glass with the eloquence of his gestures. "For fourteen days—no, fifteen—this species of camel has kept me sitting on my behind in his sacred offices. Every day it is the same: 'So sorry, but administrative difficulties prevent . . .' or 'So sorry, but Governor Horn is on vacation . . . .' I have already missed one ship to earth, and it is probable that I shall miss another. What does he want? For me to die here of old age?"

"You have not heard of the curious habits of Ricardo Holm?" said Iflatun Faruq, a slender swarthy man with the look of the Fertile Crescent about him.

"No. What to me are the eccentricities of some pig of a governor? I deliver myself therefrom. I am an archaeologist, me. I come, I dig, I go. I take my finds to my museum and write my reports. I mind my own business."

"What detriment!" said Iflatum Faruq, sipping delicately. "I was warned before I left Baghdad, but fortunately Governor Holm's cupidity does not extend to small invertebrates."

"The animal wishes to be bribed, *hein?* I might have known."

"Yes, my friend, but not in the usual way."

"What is it you wish to say?"

"Ricardo Holm demands bribes of a particular sort before he will sign the exit-permit of any scientist. To be brief, he wants your collection—or a large part of it at least."

"Hm." Amaury Brisson made a remark reflecting upon Governor Holm's love-life. "What is the object of this dirty pig? To sell these rarities that I and my colleagues have acquired with such pain and risk? That seems degraded even for a popularly-elected governor."

"No. This governor is a man of ample means, which he has no need to supplement by such extortion. In most respects he is even considered honest."

Brisson snorted. Iflatum Faruq continued:

"Ricardo Holm is a fanatical collector of what he considers curios and objects of art. And since it is not practical for him to roam the galaxy picking up samples, he extorts their finds from archaeologists visiting Kterem. His house, I am told, is something of the fabulous."

Brisson snorted again. "No doubt

with relics strewn about on mantlepieces and whatnots, with no record of their provenance."

"Absolutely. He knows nothing of science, but knows what he considers pretty."

"Well, he shan't have my pieces. I'll see the rascal in the fire first."

"My poor Amaury! What will you do?"

"I shall expose the type."

"To what good? The kind of people one finds in such a place don't care. In fact they would admire him for thinking of such a smart trick. All one could do would be to stay over until the next election, enter politics, and try to displace this Holm."

Brisson shuddered. "I deliver myself from politics! If there were only some sort of interplanetary government to whom one could appeal—"

"True, but there is not. And so . . . "

Iflatun Faruq broke off and grasped Brisson's wrist.

"There! Do you see what I see?"

"What?"

"That man! The one in green shorts."

"What about him?"

"Ricardo Holm!"

"Oh, ah!" Brisson gulped the rest of his drink and looked. The man in question was a big heavy-set fellow with abundant gray hair. He plowed up to the bar, said something to the bartender, drank the resulting drink at a swallow, and swept the room with a bloodshot glance. Then he started out.

Brisson muttered: "I'll see about that filthy beast or my name is not Jean-Pierre Amaury Jules-Cesar Michel Perigord Brisson!"

"Hey!" cried Faruq, but without effect. Before he had finished reciting his own name, Brisson had leaped up, ignoring the crash of his glass to the floor and the fact that he had not paid for his drinks, to rush after the disappearing governor.

Brisson arrived at the entrance to the Northern Cross just as Governor Holm was getting into his automobile. With a howl of "Assassin!" Brisson hurled himself into the vehicle beside the astonished governor and grasped the latter's lapels.

"Now one has you!" yelled Brisson. "Species of dirty animal, you shall not escape the penalty of your crimes! There is no hope!"

The chaugeur-bodyguard in the front seat squirmed around and poked a pistol into Brisson's face.

"Do I shoot?" said the bodyguard.

Brisson, red-faced and breathing hard, released the governor's jacket.

"Go ahead, shoot!" he said. "One more to your numberless atrocities, what difference?"

"Would you mind telling me what this is all about?" inquired Holm.

"You are the rascal who has been holding up my exit permit, so you can rob me of my archaeological finds! But you shall never succeed, if I have to spend ten thousand years here!"

"Oh. And who are you?"

Brisson identified himself.

"I see," said the governor. "Of course I expect courtesy for courtesy . . . But right now I've got other things on my mind. I can't worry about your exit permit, or your antiques either."

"Ah?" Brisson became aware of the strained and stricken face of the governor. "May one ask?"

Grief showed through the governor's self-possession. "They got my wife."

"Who?"

"The damned natives. She would run off—that is, ah—she went sightseeing in the Tshimvi country and got caught in a battle."

"The battle of Khye Pass of which we have been hearing rumors?"

"Yes."

"But how it is frightful! Was she killed, my poor friend?"

"No. Horko's got her, but she wasn't hurt."

"Ah!" said Brisson in a less sympathetic tone. "Sometimes I wish somebody would seize my wife like that. But since the Kteremians are bark-eaters exclusively except at the mating season, and as that is far distant, I don't think you need worry about the fate of the unhappy Mrs. Holm."

Ricardo Holm looked at Brisson with compressed lips, then said: "There's a hell of a lot more to it than that. You know that country pretty well, don't you?"

Brisson shrugged. "I've been over it, yes."

"Do you know those chiefs, Horko and Zhewha?"

"But yes! In fact I think that I am the only earthman who has ever gained the confidence of the Znaci."

"Treacherous devils."

"So would you be, if you'd been treated as they have."

Holm made an impatient motion. "And you want your exit-permit without any strings attached, don't you?"

"Of course. That is what I am pushing cries about."

"Well, come on over to my place and maybe we can make a deal. Home, Lin."

THE bodyguard drove furiously to the governor's mansion, clearing the way with his siren. Inside, Brisson whistled at the gleam of the many archaeological treasures, gold and jade and crystal, that Governor Holm had amassed, hung from the walls and otherwise disposed about. Holm said:

"A pretty swell little collection, isn't it? Even if I say so myself."

"I don't suppose you ever kept records of where and from what strata these finds were taken, did you?"

"Wasn't interested. Maybe the guys who gave 'em to me know."

"So, as a result of your unprincipled rapacity, the clues that make these objects of value to the interpretation of the past are scattered and lost for all time. It is the cowheads like you—"

"Look here, damn it, I didn't bring you here to lecture me! Anyway this planet's got enough ruined cities to stock every museum on earth. So let's get down to business."

"Well? I attend."

Holm lit a cigarette. "Do you—did you know a man named Ivan Dolgoruki?"

"A trader, no? I encountered him once at Severak, but I shouldn't say I knew him."

"Was, you mean. He was killed in the battle."

"So?"

"But my Euphemia was captured by Horko, who's holding her as hostage."

"What does he want you to do?"

"To recognize his claim to the ownership of the whole Sveho Purchase. He claims title to the tract on the ground that the sale to the earthmen by the Tshimvi was invalid because his people owned the land before the Tshimvi drove 'em out. Now that he's chased the Tshimvi clear out of the whole damned country, he claims the Znaci ownership of the Purchase is still valid."

"Ah," said Brisson. "And does he expect all the earthmen in Sveho to pack up for home?"

"No, he'll settle for a lease. But I can't admit anything but outright, legal, incontestible ownership, or some day in the future some windbag will persuade the natives to try to drive us off the whole damned planet. You know, the old foreign-devil gag."

"Did the Znaci own the tract at one time?"

"Depends on who you're talking to. They say yes; the Tshimvi say no, mostly, I think, just to spite the Znaci. As neither of 'em have any written records it's a tossup which is the bigger set of liars. The Znaci claim their ancestors built Ozymandias."

Ozymandias was a huge statue on a sort of natural pedestal, a few miles outside the city of Sveho, well within the bounds of Sveho Purchase. Nobody knew who had carved it. The Kteremian tribes had various stories of its origin, but these were either obvious myths or were suspiciously designed to serve the interests of the tribes that told them, and in any case they were wildly contradictory. The name "Ozymandias" had been casually conferred by an earthman who, though evidently a person of some culture, could not be bothered with mastering the grunts and whistles of the Kteremian languages. Holm continued:

"I sometimes wonder, how come these natives worked up to civilization so many times, but always went back to the way they are now? Maybe you know the answer?"

"It seems to be the nature of the beast. They are intelligent but emotionally unstable, much subject to envy, feelings of inferiority, and destructive impulses. We have those qualities too, of course, but not to the same degree. That's why every

time a tribe has raised itself to a standard above its neighbors, the latter have attacked it and pulled it back down. They cannot bear that another should surpass them, which also accounts for the rancorous feelings they often hold towards earthmen even when they have been well treated. It also explains why they have never been able to achieve a political unity—with a few exceptions like the Hrata Empire—larger than the tribe."

"Just as good for us. If they all got together . . . But to get back to our deal: The tribes aren't all in on this plan of Horko's by a long shot. They're afraid it'll lead to open war, they don't want their trade disrupted, and they're afraid of our fire-power. On the other hand they're afraid of the Znaci, since these are the strongest tribe. So they're calling a conference of chiefs at Gdoz to thrash the matter out. Now, I want you to go there and get Euphemia away from them."

"What?" cried Brisson. "Am I a magician? How am I supposed to do that without an army?"

"Oh, you'll figure out a way. Promise anything you like; shoot Horko in the back; I don't care, so long as you get results and don't start a general holy war against earthmen."

"And why, my dear governor, should I undertake this mad scheme?"

"Because until you get Euphemia back here I won't sign your exit permit. That's final."

"Give me a day to think about it," said Brisson. Mentally he cursed the surplus of males in Sveho, which resulted in the fact that those who did have women would go to extraordinary lengths to keep them.

NEXT morning Amaury Brisson and Iflatun Faruq chugged out on motor-scooters for a look at Ozymandias. The statue stood near the lower end of Sveho Valley, which was more or less congruent with the Sveho Purchase. The valley narrowed here: a flat alluvial plain through which the Sveho River wound its way, surrounded by steep black cliffs of intrusive basalt. The pedestal towered over the heads of the earthmen, the red of its sandstone contrasting with the black of the statue.

Faruq said: "Now we have two madmen: Holm for proposing this project and you for falling in with it."

"Be of good heart, my friend. It is an intolerable delay on one hand, against a small display of courage on the other. Besides, I have an idea that may make the venture a little less desperate. This statue was evidently not carved where it now is. Does one know from whence it came originally?"

Faruq pointed. "That recess in the hills is supposed to be the quarry from which it was taken, though nobody knows how these unknown builders hauled it up on to its pedestal. It would be quite a feat even

with modern construction-machinery, and as far as is known the Kteremians have never mastered any such engineering technics."

"Unless the Doznyi did it," said Brisson, frowning. He referred to the race of prehistoric demigods that lurked at the back of the Kteremian myths. "But that is also improbable, for the material evidence of their existence shows a cultural level no higher than that of the historical Kteremian peoples."

They walked around the high narrow mesa on which stood the statue. On the far side they came upon a group of tame Kteremians eating a picnic lunch of bark. The two parties glanced at one another before turning back to their own affairs. Like most earthmen who had had to do directly with wild Kteremians, uncontaminated by earthly influence, Brisson had a poor opinion of the half-terra-fied product of trader and missionary influence, wearing pants over its feathery pelt and sedulously imitating the aliens' vices. Unlike most, he pitied rather than scorned these deracinated barbarians who had lost most of their own culture without mastering that of the earthmen.

Brisson walked away from Ozymandias to snap a few photographs, then went back to the base of the pedestal, shed his burdens, and began to climb up the furrows that erosion had cut into the sandstone.

"Take care that you do not break the head," said Faruq.

"Don't worry, my old, I have climbed higher mountains than this."

Despite his plumpness Brisson expertly wormed his way up to the base of the statue proper. Ozymandias was in the form of a figure seated on a throne, sitter and throne chiselled from the same huge block. At least it looked as much like that as anything, for time had so weathered and worn it away that no small details, such as facial features or inscriptions, remained. One could not even be sure that the sitter was one of the present species of semi-civilized Kteremians, though Brisson felt fairly sure that it at least did not represent an earthman. His head barely topped the sitter's feet.

He took out a small petrographic analyzer and ran a series of quick tests on the rock: hardness, goniophotometric, and so forth. He picked up a couple of small pieces of rock that had spilled off and lay around the base, climbed back down, and joined Faruq, who asked:

"Have you made up your mind yet?"

"I think so. Of course," Brisson made a deprecating gesture, "this isn't the science. This is the tactics of a lawyer: make the most of everything that supports your side, and suppress or distort everything to the contrary. Ah, well."

AMAURY Brisson flew to the outpost of Severak, whose factor

had a helicopter which he rented out on a drive-yourself basis. Brisson rented this machine on Holm's expense-account, and with one tame Kteremian helper to carry his food (as he could not live on bark like the natives) and flew to the small plateau overlooking the Valley of Plashce. This is the only practical landing-place near the ruins of Gdoz. Then he had an arduous three-day scramble over ledges and through swamps to reach the ruin itself.

The chiefs' conference was already going. Armed guards pounced on Brisson as soon as he approached the city. As he was well-known among the tribes represented at this pow-wow, he was treated less roughly than a strange earthman would have been.

The meeting was held in the ruined amphitheater of Gdoz. There was a commotion among the chiefs and their retainers as the guards led Brisson forward. Chief Horko, who had the floor at the moment, stopped his speech to stare, his great incisors showing pink. Behind the huddle of chiefs, on one of the stone benches that had seen enacted the great but forgotten dramatic compositions of the Hrata Empire, sat Euphemia Holm, a dark well-developed wench with the remnants of her clothes pinned together with thorns.

Horko said: "What are you doing here, Biso?"

Brisson replied in fluent Znaci: "Chief Holm heard that there was to be a conference of chiefs and sent me as his deputy. His feelings are much hurt that you did not invite him."

The chiefs grunted and whistled at one another. This was motivation that they could understand. Brisson continued:

"So, hearing that matters concerning him were to be discussed, he thought it beneath his honor that he should not be represented. Have you come to these matters yet?"

"We were just beginning," said Horko. "If you wish me to repeat my preamble—"

"Thank you, that will not be necessary," said Brisson, who knew something of Kteremian oratory. "Pray continue."

"As I was saying, the blood of our ancestors cries out from the ground: give us back our land! Who are these arrogant creatures from other worlds, to claim a single foot of sacred Kteremian soil? Any sale to them is automatically invalid, and the punishment lately inflicted upon the Tshimvi was surely visited by the gods for their sin in alienating the Sveho Tract, which did not even belong to them—"

"Excuse me," said Brisson, "but why did it not?"

"Because under the immemorial customs of the Kteremian peoples, a tribe does not get firm title to a tract until it has occupied it in adverse possession for a hundred and ninety-six years!"

Brisson recognized the square of fourteen, the base of the Kteremian number-system, as they had that total number of digits each—three on each birdlike foot and four on each hand.

"But," continued Horko, "we, the Znaci, possessed the Sveho Tract up to two hundred and fifty-eight years ago, at which time we were ejected from it by the Tshimvi, as a result of an unjust and aggressive war."

"You never did own the tract!" shouted one whom Brisson recognized as Zhewha, the Tshimvi chieftain. "Moreover the war to which you allude was forced upon us by the refusal of the Znaci to surrender the murderers of Yesil to justice—"

"What kind of justice could an accused Znaci expect of the Tshimvi?" shrieked Horko. "Coward and liar—"

All the chiefs yelled to sit down and shut up. At length, unable to make themselves heard over the din, the disputants did so. After mugs of native wine were passed to cool tempers all around, Horko was allowed to resume:

"At any rate, the Tshimvi occupied this tract for only a hundred and twenty-three years, when the first earthmen arrived on Kterem with their vices and their insolence." Horko glanced at Brisson. "I do not mean you, Biso. You are not like an earthman; you are quite decent. But these creatures at once contrived the so-called Sveho Purchase. As they have been in possession only a hundred and seventy-five years, obviously neither Tshimvi nor earthmen have complied with the requirements for title."

"I still say you l— you are misinformed," said Zhewha. "Even before we drove the treacherous rabble of your ancestors into cowardly flight, the Sveho Tract was included in our boundaries."

"It was not. It was ours!"

"It was so. It was ours!"

"It was ours!"

*"It was ours!"*

"IT WAS OURS!"

The yelling began again until the argument was quieted. Brisson interjected:

"You are both making strong statements, but on what evidence? Neither of you could have been alive then."

"True," said Zhewha, "but my great-grandfather was, and from him the story has come down through the generations. I can produce as many witnesses as you like to prove that such is the tradition."

"We can do better than that," retorted Horko. "Not only do the Znaci have a tribal tradition giving the tract to us in former times, but we have left tangible proof of our occupancy in the form of the great black statue near the city of Sveho."

"Oh!" said Brisson, who had been waiting for this. "Do you claim your people made Ozymandias?"

"Certainly, though not under that

ridiculous earthly name. That is a statue of Uyedna the Fourth, chief of the Znaci in the days of the Hrata Empire."

Horko swept his glance around the ruins of the Hrata capital.

"And so," said Brisson, "you are employing your alleged authorship of this monument to persuade the chiefs to back you in this matter, while simultaneously using your possession of the female of Chief Holm to induce him to acceed to your claim. Is that correct?"

"That is right."

"Then, chiefs, may I say a word? Good. Most of you have, I suppose, seen this statue. Perhaps you noticed that it was carved of a single piece of a notably hard, dense, heavy rock. Perhaps it occurred to you to wonder how the makers succeeded in hauling it up an almost vertical slope, several times the height of a full-grown Kteremian, to the top of that spire or natural pedestal on which it stands."

The assembled chiefs squatted silent and watchful.

"Perhaps you even wondered how that pinnacle happened to grow in just the right size and shape to serve as a base for the statue," Brisson continued. "Perhaps my good friend Horko can explain these things. How did your people get the statue up there, Horko?"

Horko's incisors clicked wordlessly. At last he said: "How should I know? I am no earthman."

"Come, come! Did they equip it with wings so that it could soar to its present position?"

"Do not mock me! I suppose they plaited ropes of grass or hide and stood on the top to haul it up."

"Have you measured that top? I have, and I assure you that it would not accommodate one-hundredth the number of Kteremians needed to haul that weight into position. Well?"

Horko muttered: "The Hrata kings had some powerful magicians. Maybe one of these put a spell on it."

"Oh, now really! If the Hrata kings had possessed the powers your myths attribute to them, the Znaci and their allies could never have overthrown the Hrata Empire, now could they?"

"Well, you insolent earthman, have *you* an explanation?"

"Certainly. I examined the statue just before I came here, and I can give you a good idea of how it originated. It was built, not by the Znaci or any other present-day people, but by the Doznyi; and it was erected not a few hundred years ago, but hundreds of thousands or even millions of years ago."

The audience gave a slight whistling gasp. Brisson, suppressing a grin, hurried on:

"The quarry from which this statue was dug still exists in the hills flanking Sveho Valley. I went over the valley carefully, and found indications that back before Doznyi times it was not just a valley but a

*lake*. The streams flowing into this lake laid down a deposit of sandstone. Then the outlet eroded its way down until the lake-water ran out, leaving this flat sandstone surface dry save for the Sveho River.

"Then the Doznyi civilization rose. The Doznyi carved this statue of some king or god—we shall never know which—and hauled it across the level valley on sleds or rollers to its present site, then on a level with the rest of the valley floor. In later ages the valley rose and erosion came into play. The Sveho river cut down through the sandstone into the softer strata beneath, and the downpours of the rainy season washed away the topsoil—except where this statue stood. Protected by the monument, the sandstone under the statue remained in place while that all around was broken up and washed away. So now the statue stands on the pedestal it made for itself. If it were not of a fine-grained and extremely hard rock it would long since have disappeared too, and as things are it is badly worn.

"Therefore, you see, this statue could never have been built by the Znaci, because they could not have raised it to its present height. And so I fear I must tell you that my friend Horko, no doubt from the most praiseworthy motives, is a liar and a fraud, who has tried to draw you into dangerous conflict with the earthmen in order to satisfy his inordinate ambition.

"Now, since there is no reason for you to back his demand upon Sveho, his whole plan falls to the ground. There is therefore no further excuse for his holding this female earthman, thus straining the relations between our two peoples."

As he spoke, Brisson walked calmly to where Euphemia Holm sat. He held out a hand to her, hauled her roughly to her feet, and started for the exit, saying:

"Friend chiefs, this has been a most interesting session. Any time you wish some such puzzling question solved, drop in on me at Sveho for a consultation. Good-bye."

He walked briskly, dragging Euphemia almost at a trot. Behind him, after a moment of stunned silence, a violent squabble broke out among the chiefs. A backward glance showed Brisson that a couple of them were holding the struggling Horko. The tame Kteremian joined the terrestrials. As soon as the shattered walls and pillars of Gdoz hid the conference, Brisson said:

"Run!"

"But—"

"Run like anything! If we can get a good start, we might just beat them to my helicopter!"

They ran, like anything.

* * *

FIVE days later Ricardo Holm met Amaury Brisson and Euphemia Holm (more adequately clad) at the little airport outside

Sveho. He pecked his wife's cheek, wrung Brisson's hand, and gave them a ride to the gubernatorial mansion. Again Brisson repressed a grimace at the sight of the scores of archaeological objects serving as mere decorations.

The governor rummaged in his desk and came up with a bottle. "Here," he said, "is real honest-to-God earthly champagne. Practically priceless, and I've been saving it for some such occasion."

He poured and they drank appreciatively while Brisson and Euphemia told of their experiences. Brisson noticed that Euphemia said very little about Ivan Dolgoruki, whose part in this affair remained curiously vague. Finally Brisson looked at his watch and said:

"I must pick up my gear and get to the airport."

"Are you leaving for earth?" asked Holm.

"Yes; I am already far behind my schedule. So if you will please sign my exit permit . . ."

"Oh, what's your hurry? Stay over till the next ship."

"I'm sorry, but the next ship doesn't leave for forty-three days, and I have professional business to attend to back on earth. Will you please sign, governor?"

Holm looked at him through narrowed lids. "Now, wait a minute, pal. I said I wouldn't sign unless you got Euphemia back, but I didn't say I *would* sign when you did."

"Oh, you fibber! You said as plainly as you are speaking now—"

"Whatever I said then, it's what I'm saying now that counts. I still expect courtesy for courtesy."

"You mean you're still trying to rob me of my specimens?"

"I wouldn't put it that way, but I do expect something for my consideration of your interests. Just let me pick half; you can keep the rest."

"You—" Brisson choked. "You miserable brigand! You vile poltroon!"

"Well?"

"Before I do that, I will go back to Horko and tell him how his ancestors could have got that statue up on the pedestal!"

*"What?"*

"Certainly. They could have used a long inclined ramp and dug it away afterwards. I still think my first theory is the more probable, but Horko won't care about that. Ha, filthy wretch, you cower and pale, do you not?"

"You wouldn't betray your own kind!"

"Wouldn't I? What have my own kind done for me on Kterem, except to try to rob me of the fruits of my scientific labors?"

"Well, it won't happen any more." Holm pressed a spring and a drawer of his desk flew open. He snatched out a pistol and pointed it at Brisson.

"I'm sorry to kill you, little man," he said, "but you're too dangerous. I can't have anybody running around

here with such subversive ideas."

"You do not dare. They will hang you."

"Hang *me*, the guy who makes up the jury-lists? Not likely. Anyway we don't care much for scientists here; always poking their noses into other folks' business and taking the side of the damned natives against their own kind."

Ricardo Holm raised the gun. Before he could shoot, Euphemia, who was standing beside him, picked up an ithyphallic brass statue of Aletshim, the fertility-god of the Fshi, from the gubernatorial desk and brought it down on her spouse's head.

Before Holm could even roll out of his chair to the floor, Brisson pounced upon him and snatched the gun from his limp hand.

"He doesn't seem badly hurt," he said after a brief examination. "But what shall I do now, me?"

"Your rocket leaves in a couple of hours, doesn't it?"

"Yes. You mean I should go and catch it? But my exit permit?"

"I'll forge Ricardo's signature."

"That is wonderful. But why . . .?"

"Because you're taking me with you."

"What?" cried Brisson.

"Certainly. You don't think I want to be around when this awful husband of mine comes to, do you? I can't stand the stinker even when he's in a good humor, and now . . . Why do you suppose I eloped with Ivan Dolgoruki?"

"Oh, ah." Brisson thought. So that was it! And such was the effect of the woman-shortage that Holm had been prepared to take her back with no more than a scolding. Brisson reflected that his own wife would probably find out about this and make life hell for him when he got back, but she always made it hell for him anyway.

"The native servants are all out for the afternoon," continued Euphemia, "so there's nobody on the grounds but Lin, and he can drive us to the port. Help me drag a trunk down from the attic so I can throw a few dresses into it."

"I will do more than that." Brisson wrestled the governor's shirt off and tore it up to bind and gag him. "I will get a couple of trunks and fill one with these relics your spouse has so villainously extorted from my poor colleagues. Perhaps I can return some of them to their rightful owners. And then I should like to see this species of assassin get them back!"

Euphemia Holm straightened up from the task of rolling the bound and unconscious governor into a closet. "You *are* a funny fellow! Dolgoruki wasn't very bright, but at least at a time like this he wasn't thinking about archeological relics! Oh, well, I suppose that's science for you. The attic is this way."

THE END

# The GOLDEN GUARDSMEN

By

S. J. Byrne

(*Conclusion*)

**Izdran of the Thousand Lives and Stephen Germain came to grips, the stake a whole solar system—and all Earth stood aghast at the awful forces that were unleashed; and at the marvel of a super human pitted against something not at all human!**

What has gone before:

*WORLD War III began with Nicholas I of New Russia, who ruled the Earth with an iron hand, enjoying a greater might and power than Hitler or Napoleon or Genghis Khan. However, his downfall began with Stephen Germain, whom he had transformed into a surgical mutant. As a result, Germain rose up to help Agarthi and the Elder Race against him and his interstellar allies, who had held Earth in secret bondage for ages. Nicholas and some of his aides attempted to escape from Earth in a space ship conceived of by Germain, but the Elder People sought to destroy him. His ship was destroyed, but he and one aide, Sergeyev Pavlovich, managed to make a landing on Mars in a small commuter vessel. There, for almost a year, they searched for the mysterious and elusive overlords of Mars, the much-feared Nrlani race, who they felt, might be able to help them reconquer Earth. The surface of Mars is inhabited by the nomadic Gdjinhji who sometimes frequent the haunted ancient cities of the early pyramid builders and moon worshippers—an archaeological mystery. Beneath the surface of Mars are slave cities and factories where Gdjinhji prisoners, under the mental control of telepathic robots built by the Nrlani, are engaged in ceaseless preparations for a superman war against Earth and against even the authority of the Elder Race. Nich-*

**Two super-ships, robot manned, speed for Earth!**

*olas and his companion, Pavlovich, finally locate the town of Druhdrui, among ancient pyramids, where they are taken in by the Martian girl, Trinha Llih and her father, Grlahn, a greedy merchant who wishes to capitalize on their presance. Having learned some of the language by now, Nicholas tells them who he is and warns them of Stephen Germain. He is determined to return and conquer Germain, but he needs their help, he says, and he needs the help, particularly of the Nrlani. He understands that the Nrlani make an appearance once in a Martian year at Druhdrui. Terrified, the natives inform him that no one seeks the Nrlani for fear of ending up in a Martian slave city. They fear especially the overlord chief of the Nrlani, Izdran of a "Thousand Lives". It is Izdran, precisely, whom Nicholas wishes to contact. While waiting for the Nrlani to appear, Nicholas is given Trinha Llih by her father. She comes to him in the hopes of fulfilling a childhood belief in an old fairytale,*

*in which Mrahl Sahn, Prince of the Sky, takes her away with him to Pahn (Earth), Guardian Star of the Twin Moons (Deimos and Phobos). But Nicholas casts her to Pavlovich and dreams, instead, of another woman like her with raven black hair — of Lillian Germain, Stephen Germain's wife, whom he once held captive and whom he is determined to take again. For this, Trinha hates him and vows a personal vengeance of her own. When the Nrlani appear in their sky city above Druhdrui, they emerge out of apparent nothingness and Pavlovich is afraid, but Nicholas tells him that there is no sphere of supernatural phenomena, that all is physical reality—even Heaven, itself, if such a thing existed. He tells him that nothing can violate the physical fundamental of Cause and Effect, and that as such the sky city might be understood and even conquered. The Nrlani bring the Gdjinhji a narcotic called ca'ta, used only by the male Martians, in exchange for a sticky substance found on Mars, called grabdal. In the process of this bartering, Nicholas contacts Izdran, presents his case, and is invited into the sky city. However, he and Pavlovich are followed by Trinha Llih, who professes an insatiable desire to travel into space and perhaps one day reach Pahn (Earth). In the sky city they are confronted by Izdran physically, and he proves to be so inhuman in appearance that even Nicholas' first reaction is to kill him, which proves to be a futile gesture. Izdran is an alien creature of superhuman abilities, possessed of multiple hearts and a dual mind and personalities capable of working independently of each other. He and his race are the remnants of a civilization that once flourished on Nr-lan, the fifth planet, which is now represented by the asteroid belt. Actually, the Elder Race blasted their planet out of existence, but some of the Nrlani escaped into secret hiding, where they have been preparing for millenia of time to emerge and take over again. These creatures are anathema to human life, but Nicholas makes a bargain with them and is promised a quisling rulership of Earth—although Izdran readily perceives the treacherous Earthman has secret plans of his own in that regard. Nicholas proceeds Earthward with a space armada manned by telepathic robots, which are remotely controlled through the Nrlanian Central Control, a secret place whose location the Nrlani will not divulge, as it is their nerve center and the secret of their power. Nicholas takes Trinha Llih with him, partly on the insistence of Izdran, who hopes to use her, under telepathic control of one of his dual minds, as a pawn. Pavlovich, in a deadly ship especially prepared for the task, is given the suicidal assignment of surprising Stephen Germain and destroying him while*

*he is momentarily outside the protection of Agarthi. Germain, in the company of his old battle buddy, Michael Kent, is engaged in an argument before the Council of the Terrestrial Government on Earth as Pavlovich approaches. He has told Earth that the Elder Race, before it departed for its distant home, assigned him the office of Star Warden, entailing responsibility for the safety of the Solar System. He explains that Terrestrial Government is sovereign, but that they must accept the Agarthian Charter, which provides an Emergency Clause whereby Agarthi would take over martial law control of Terrestrial government in the event of extra-terrestrial aggression. He is rebuked by Gormski, Soviet representative to the Council. The Council representatives are unaware that at that moment a superman war hangs over their heads, and that it is Germain, alone, who can save them. They are arrogant and spurn his help, accusing him of using his mutant faculties to pull the wool over their eyes and thus gain power over the Earth. In disgust, Germain and Kent return hastily to Agarthi and there go into a conference with the Agarthian Elders and the Golden Guardsmen, whose leader is Steve Rockner. There Dr. Borg explains that the enemy is using a new type of energy which he and Dr. Grange refer to as "second order" energy. They are working on a method of penetrating the enemy's second order screens. They also point out that the flying saucers are living creatures of the void which, in some way, are connected with the Nrlani. Germain senses imminent danger to himself and he sends Lillian, his wife, to Guam in the company of Kent, as on Guam he has a laboratory fortress which contains Elder Race gear, He feels she, too, is endangered, and believes that she will be safest there. Then Pavlovich attacks him, because he did not reach Earth in time to strike at him while he was in New York. In the course of the attack, Germain demonstrates mutant powers he did not know he possessed. They drive Pavlovich and his robots off after Borg and Grange actually develop second order defenses. Nicholas has been delaying his own grand attack because he has been working out a plan whereby he will gain direct control of the robot fleets and wrest power from the Nrlani. To do this, he rescues Gerhardt Eidelmann, former Nazi scientist and experimenter with Elder Race equipment, from his prison in Berlin. As the Terrestrial Government, suspecting the presence of the invisible robot fleet, scorns Germain's warnings and engages the Nrlanian ships in space battle, they are literally mowed down. This causes Agarthi to gird itself and its allies, the Lunar Interstellars, for battle. Pavlovich contacts Trinha Llih in the camp of Nicholas I in Russia and she*

*advises him that Eidelmann is about to succeed in giving Nicholas separate control over the robots. Still seeking vengeance against Nicholas and actually guided by Izdran, she uses Pavlovich by pretending to care for him. Together they plan to take over Eidelmann's invention, which would place the Nrlanian robot fleet in Pavlovich's hands. In the meantime, it appears that Kent has been obsessed by Izdran while enroute to Guam with Lillian. He hands her over to the Nrlani without remembering that he had acted as their pawn. Germain communicates telepathically with Kent's sister, Yvonne, who lives in the Guam laboratory. He instructs her to activate a dreaded Elder machine of great and mysterious power, the Chronoperceptor. Germain is especially concerned and angered as he and the Golden Guardsmen plunge into outer space to join their allies, the Lunar Interstellars, to engage the enemy, because Lillian Germain had just informed him, prior to her abduction, that she was going to experience a "blessed event". Kent returns to the Council of the Terrestrial Government, and outlines what has happened. He tells them of the super-menace that faces Earth. He is thrown out of the Council. That night he learns of Lillian's abduction from his sister, and of his unwitting part in it. Yvonne suggests he come to Guam to be with her, because she is afraid of the Chronopercepter which she has placed in operation. Nicholas and Eidelmann have completed their plans to take over the robot fleet, and put their mechanism into operation which will take over from Central Control. Pavlovich comes in, tries to take over. Eidelmann is killed in the fracas, and Nicholas flees. Trinha Llih turns over the new Central Control to Pavlovich. Nicholas forces Eidelmann's chief assistant, Dr. Reinsch, to rebuild the Zero-Bomb, which will start a chain reaction which will destroy the Earth. He flees in Eidelmann's private ship, sets the bomb for one hundred hours, and intends to deliver an ultimatum to Agarthi, Earth, Pavlovich, Germain and the Lunar Interstellars. If they do not accept his terms, he will allow the bomb to detonate. Out in space, Rocky and his respective fleets, that of Agarthi, of the Lunar Interstellars and of the Golden Guardsmen await the battle they know is coming. Germain, in his own ship, the NOVA, the only one with second order equipment, is searching Izdran's mind with a psychic heterodyner, in an attempt to discover the Nrlani secret Central Control. He succeeds, but at that moment the flying saucers, under mental control of the Nrlani, attack the ship, render all aboard unconscious by draining their life energy slowly from them. Germain remains awake, but only at terrific effort. Meanwhile the saucers are also attacking the fleet, and dozens of*

*ships are going out of control, beginning a long plunge into the sun. While partly unconscious, Germain communicates with Izdran psychically, and Izdran also summons Pavlovich to a weird conference just above the flames of the sun. Izdran informs both he has won. That Earth will be destroyed, because Germain and the fleets will not answer Nicholas' ultimatum for the simple reason that they cannot release themselves from the spell of the flying saucers in order to do so. Izdran poses a problem for Germain. He tells him he has Lillian a prisoner, in a place where her air will be gone at the same time the bomb is scheduled to go off, so that Germain must choose which he will try to save, Lillian or the Earth—but aware that it cannot be both. Then Izdran releases Germain to return to his ship, where he fights a losing battle against unconsciousness. Meanwhile, Trinha Llih has traced Nicholas, and is joined by Eidelmann, who suddenly returns to life, although not actually, because he had two selves under the Doppelganger principle he invented during World War III when he provided Nicholas with uncounted duplicate soldiers for his army. Knowing that someday he might be murdered, he had created a double of himself, hidden away, and now this double has come to take the original Eidelmann's place. Together they steal Pavlovich's ship and proceed to Mars in pursuit of Nicholas, upon whom Trinha Llih wants vengeance, and Eidelmann plans to usurp. Germain escapes from his ship by dematerializing himself and recomposing his atoms, together with a space suit, outside the hull. He plummets down toward Mars in free fall. On Earth the Terrestrial Government receives Nicholas' ultimatum, and Gormski advises surrender, after contacting Pavlovich, who has already surrendered. Now Dr. Borg and Dr. Grange have completed a second second order ship, and they capture a flying saucer. But it rarefies and vanishes, escaping them. It gives them an idea, however, and they plan to use their ship for rarefying, as well as densifying. As they stumble on this plan, they are notified that Central Control is on Deimos, the information having come in from Germain's automatic recorder. Finding his whole fleet blacking out one ship after another, Rocky orders an attack on Mars by those ships still answering call, orders still another portion of the fleet to densify and try to elude the flying saucers that way, and himself, together with his wife, proceed to attach themselves to an Ultimate Power bomb and try to outrun the saucers to Deimos, since the bomb is the fastest thing they have ever devised. Germain, falling toward Mars, is attacked by a flying disc and defeats it in psychic attack. It flees, attenuating into nothingness as it goes into another*

*plane. A thought strikes him. Perhaps the disc, now not in control by Izdran, might be the means of getting him safely down to Mars. His flying carpet of safety.*

*"Hey!" he yelled, trying to recall it. But it was too late. The disc was gone.*

Now go on with the story:

"HEY yourself!" came a human voice into his ears. It was from his space phone!

"What! Who's calling? Where are you?" His mind raced outward and soon discovered the long, ominous shape of a U. P. bomb, which was exclusive ordnance of the Golden Guardsmen. He was aware of two people traveling with the bomb, but he could not see them with his ESP. He struggled to turn in space, and finally he saw the bomb with his eyes. On top of it were two space-suited figures one inch high, lashed by thread-like cable to two large cargo rings.

"If you're thumbing a ride you're in luck!" came Rocky's voice. "Because I think we're the only tourists within a couple of thousand miles!"

"Oh Rocky!" Germain heard Janice's impatient voice. "You'd make a bad pun if you were being boiled in oil. Is this a time for such perversion—I *ask* you!"

"No. I'm incurable. Hey, Germain! We're coming alongside!"

Germain quickly surmised what had happened to Rocky's flagship and what Rocky had done to escape the discs. He also knew now that Rocky was not leading that task force below against Fortress Mars. But the U. P. bomb interested him. With direct controls on it, and equipped as it was with the almost inexhaustible power that propelled it, they could navigate back to Earth if they did not starve or die of thirst, or, which was more likely, of asphyxiation. Certainly they could make a safe landing on Mars if they were not spotted or shot down first.

But there was another possibility.

"Where do you think you are going on that thing?" he asked Rocky.

"Haven't you been reading your mail? Central Control is on Deimos. Want to come along?"

Germain grappled for the line that came drifting by him, and soon he was pulling himself down to the surface of the relatively gigantic bomb. Rocky, to let him get in close, had lowered the rocket's meteor screen.

"This isn't the safest means of transportation," he remarked. "Get that screen out in a hurry."

"It's out there. You're lucky you weren't hit floating around unprotected like that."

"This is a ticklish means of transportation," persisted Germain. "If that screen should fail and a meteor should get through—"

"We wouldn't even know it, what with all the 'Kingdom Come' this baby carries—but the people around Alpha Centauri might. It'd be like

a nova. Incidentally, where *is* the Nova?"

"It is out of sight now, because as Mars' third satellite its period of revolution is less than that of Phobos, and that's traveling! In view of the vital business at hand I'll have to investigate her later, even if she is a sitting duck for Martian defenses. We can only pray that your Guardsman ships down there give them enough to occupy their attention until we get some things straightened out, ourselves."

"Weren't David and Ingaborg with you?" asked Janice.

"Yes, but I think they're all in a state of suspended animation. Just now, what is more important than Central Control is Nicholas. I've got to locate him."

Briefly, he related his mental experience with Izdran. Nicholas, he believed, had gone to Mars.

"But what about Lillian?" asked Janice.

"If I can attend to Nicholas immediately, there may still be time to reach her. Rocky, take us as close in to Mars as you dare. I'm going to do some concentrating."

With primary screen extended to protect the bomb as much as possible, Rocky navigated close in, even penetrating the upper reaches of the Martian atmosphere. Suddenly, the three of them became aware of several curious looking objects drifting near them. They reminded Janice of nerve cells she had often examined under microscopes, except that these measured perhaps two feet in length. Beyond these were others, and as their eyes sought these latter their vision adapted itself to further distances. They began to make out literally hundreds of the strange, drifting objects. It was their first glimpse of the Martian djurnur pods.

"What are they?" asked Rocky.

"I hope they are not cousins to the flying discs," remarked Janice.

"Rocky," said Germain, "I'd like to capture one of those. There's not much time to investigate, but there's one over there that we ought to be able to catch. I want to take a close look. It may be important."

Unlike the discs, the pods did not increase their velocity or attenuate, nor did they appear to have any volition of their own, although they were all moving in one direction without sufficient air currents to propel them. Germain increased his size and was able to catch one easily. Then he reduced his size again, simultaneously reducing the pod with him. The three of them looked at it.

"It's vegetable matter," he said. "Some sort of giant seed pod containing a hermetically sealed air chamber." He noted that at the base of the hollow chamber there was a glittering encrustation of crystals. Something bothered him about the pods, but he had little time to reflect on it.

"They are merely a part of the Martian biological cycle," he remarked. "Perhaps unimportant to us just now."

Janice, however, took the pod from him and had a close look, herself. In the meantime, Germain began to concentrate on the planet below him. Rocky and Janice did not bother him. This sort of thing had happened before. They had a good idea of what he was doing. His extra sensory perception was actually combing the surface of Mars.

It was natural for Germain to discover Zridhn Nor with its great cluster of pyramids right on the equator. In the same instant he was aware of Nicholas' large ship on the outskirts. Since Eidelmann had his smaller vessel in secondary invisibility, Germain could not penetrate his screen, but he was aware of the presence of the latter ship by virtue of its protective envelope of second order energy. Finally, he singled out the mentality of Nicholas, himself.

NICHOLAS was standing in the trading booth of Ivan Ranl, Zridhn Nor's most prominent trader. He was in the midst of a preliminary speech of propaganda when he became aware of Germain's gigantic mentality. It was nothing more than an awareness, but Nicholas recognized it for what it was, as it had happened to him before, both in connection with Germain and Izdran.

He paused in his speech, paled, then staggered slightly. Ilyan Ranl, a slender, elderly man, stepped forward solicitously, noticing with some surprise that the Earthman had instinctively gripped the handle of his strange weapon.

"Are you ill?" he asked.

Nicholas shook his head, waving him away. He was sweating, eyes staring unseeingly ahead, while Trinha, watching from the outer darkness, wondered if he could have become obsessed by Izdran.

"Just a momentary dizziness," he gasped. "Long journey — wait a moment—"

Germain's insistent thought thundered through his mind: *Where is the Zero-Bomb? Tell me its location or you die!*

In dubious triumph, Nicholas thought back, shakenly: *Why don't you read my mind, Germain? You can't find what you want, because I prepared myself for this! Do you think I would be cheated of my only weapon at this stage? Have you forgotten that hypnotists are easily obtained on Earth? I have had them wipe from my mind my own knowledge of where the bomb is located. Once I knew where it is, but now no one knows! You can destroy me, yes, but if you do so you destroy the Earth. In less than an hour the bomb will detonate unless you surrender along with the Guardsmen and the Agarthians and the Interstellars. Only I am in a position to activate the controls that will reset the timer on the bomb. This is your last chance, Germain! Upon you rests the destiny of Earth!*

UNABLE to stand the suspense any longer, Janice interrupted

Germain. "Did you locate him?" she asked.

"He is an idiot," replied Germain, quietly. "This is going to be easy. Just a minute!"

He concentrated, and soon Nicholas was insulated from his own volition.

*You will proceed at once to your ship,* commanded Germain. *There you will deactivate the bomb by means of your remote controls. After that you will remain in that village and entertain the natives as the village idiot until you can be taken into custody. Now go quickly!*

He was aware of the other's response. Nicholas left the trading booth, followed by a wondering populace. Under complete hypnosis, he started back toward the ship.

Germain's subconsciousness was bothering him concerning a mass of apparently disconnected facts which seemed to cry out for synthesis. His seventh sense gave him a presentiment that something vastly important would be arrived at if he could extrapolate certain observations into a logical conclusion. As Nicholas started back toward the ship, Germain turned his attention briefly to the Martians, themselves. Then he was distracted by the awareness of the second order screen surrounding the smaller ship in which Eidelmann waited on the outskirts of Zridhn Nor. He was in the midst of concentration on this latter mystery when Rocky interrupted him.

"Look out!" he yelled. "Here comes an enemy destroyer!"

The three of them saw a medium sized Nrlanian warship hurtling upward toward them.

"Full speed to Deimos!" commanded Germain. "Hang on tight!"

UNKNOWN to Germain, it was precisely at that moment that Trinha Llih leveled her radium pistol at Nicholas and fired. The explosive bullet hit him directly and detonated. The crowd following her suddenly drew back. Some of the women screamed at the grisly sight of what had been Nicholas I, Prince of Panh. His shattered remains left no question even in Trinha's mind that he was definitely, irrevocably dead. She could not quite know the echos her single shot was making in the halls of History. Like the passing of Ghenghis Khan, Napoleon, and Hitler, Nicholas' death marked the end of certain bloodied and smouldering chapters. Also, she could not know that this assassination had precipitated a chaotic concatenation of events that would be unprecedented in all the *memory* of human and humanoid civilization in Creation. Hers was not the shot heard round the world. It was to be heard in two planes of existence!

Now for Earth the hour glass was emptying fast, and Germain was unaware of it. He had been confident that Nicholas would reach his remote controls in ample time to deactivate the Zero Bomb. Instead, somewhere on Earth the timer ticked

perilously close to the point of detonation. And *more* than Earth was suspended from that point . . . . .

Trinha was only vaguely aware of being surrounded by her fellow Martians and disarmed. She was remembering a night that seemed immeasurably long ago, in which she had dreamed that her Prince of the Sky had come at last. She remembered being in Nicholas' arms, inside her father's trading booth at Druhdrui. In that moment she had offered him her virgin youth and all her hopes and dreams. Then he had thrown her to Pavlovich. She had sworn that she would be revenged, and this was it. But it was neither sweet nor bitter. It was a nothingness.

When Eidelmann maneuvered his ship over the nearby pyramids in full visibility, however, she became more conscious of what was going on. The tribesmen of Zridhn Nor held her captive, but they paused now to look at this new ship.

"What is that?" they asked her, as it landed alongside Nicholas' ship.

"Only another enemy, just as was this beast I have slain," she answered. "It is not a robot controlled Nrlanian vessel. An Earthman pilots it, but an evil one."

"One can infer from your statement," said Ilyan Ranl, "that there are good Earthmen. Who are you to know these things? You are of the Gdjinhji."

"I think I know who she is now," said another. "She is that same Trinha Llih who accompanied this Nicholas and his companion into the sky city of the Nrlani, according to the story told us by old Grlahn."

"Is this true?" asked Ilyan Ranl.

"Yes," she replied, "and I have learned many things. Since I am one of you, you should believe what I say. Nicholas was a treacherous enemy, and so is he who pilots that other ship."

"But what of the strange ships that do battle with the Nrlani?" asked Ilyan.

"They attack our oppressors," she answered. "As our liberators they cannot very well be our enemies."

"Look!" cried another tribesman. "The stranger enters the other ship!"

They saw Eidelmann enter the larger ship, but it was too late to stop him. In another minute, the vessel rose above their heads and hurtled straight up into the sky.

There was not much time to deliberate on the possible intentions of Eidelmann, because in that moment ten Earthmen walked into Zridhn Nor. They were dressed in the uniform of the Golden Guardsmen. Sam Turner was at their head.

The Gdjinhji tribesmen started to back away, warily, as they advanced, but the Earthmen smiled and made signs of peace. Trinha also reassured her people that the strangers were friends.

"I believe," she said, "that you are seeing for the first time the true emissaries of that Stephen Germain of whom Nicholas warned us. That

he warned us against them is a guarantee that they are our allies."

Immediately, the problem of communication presented itself, but finally it was discovered that Trinha spoke a little Russian. In Turner's group was a Polish Guardsman who spoke fluent Russian. Through this medium Trinha learned that one of the deadly Guardsman ships had landed nearby under secondary invisibility to undergo repairs as the result of skirmishes with the slave city fortifications. Turner and his men had observed Eidelmann's flight in both ships and had come to Zridhn Nor on foot to investigate the possibilities of picking up some quick transportation. They were referring to the smaller Nrlanian vessel, which now sat idle on the outskirts. When Ilyan expressed surprise that they should expose themselves to a Nrlanian vessel, since they could not know if it were manned or not, Turner explained that his own ship was close by and that Zridhn Nor was directly under it's ray guns.

When Turner questioned Trinha concerning her surprising knowledge of a Terrestrial language, she related to him some of the things that had happened to her. When she showed him Nicholas' remains he and his men gave a cheer and all shook hands to celebrate. The ex-dictator's death was a great milestone in the system wide clean up campaign which Agarthi had launched. But news of Eidelmann troubled him.

Turner asked about the small Nrlanian flier and Trinha told him, through the interpreter, that she could show them how to use it. In fact, she wanted to accompany them if they would promise to track down Eidelmann. Turner was well aware of what Gerhardt Eidelmann's capabilities were. This was the first news he had had concerning the German scientist's whereabouts since he had escaped from the international prison in Berlin.

"You're welcome to come with us, beautiful," he said. "We'll be glad to trail *that* character! It'll keep us busy until our own ship has been repaired, which will take about a week if we're lucky."

Trinha, of course, could not understand English, but she could understand and respond to the world of meaning that shone in Sam Turner's laughing, brown eyes. That language needed no interpreter.

Ilyan Ranl communicated with Turner through Trinha and the Polish Guardsman. "Nicholas warned us against Stephen Germain," he said. "It seems that you serve him. Who is this man, actually, and what should he mean to us?"

Turner grinned when he finally understood the other. "He's the only man with the answers," he replied. "If he hasn't got the answers, then we'll *all* be working for the Nrlani. The best thing for you and your people to do is to organize yourselves into disciplined groups of fighting men who will be able to help us out

if you are called upon in the near future to do so."

It was just after Turner and his men, in the company of Trinha Llih, took off on the trail of Eidelmann that Mars felt its first earthquake in thousands of years. They were unaware of the quake, but they did notice the sudden disappearance of Deimos. One minute it was there, racing through the Martian skies on its appointed course, and in the next minute it had disappeared as though it had ceased to exist. Then they observed that Earth's moon was no longer spinning about the Earth. It was far from its course and beginning a slow fall toward the sun.

These were but the outward signals of the beginning of universal pandemonium . . . .

* * *

THE timer on the Zero Bomb had been only thirty minutes away from detonation when it set in motion the last great piece on the Chess Board. It was Germain's hidden piece—the Elder People's gigantic Chronoperceptor on Guam.

Michael Kent and his sister, Yvonne, became aware of it simultaneously. The latter had just finished preparing them a light lunch in the laboratory's well-provisioned kitchen when she heard the alarm bell. Her brother called her and she rushed into the lab.

Michael Kent stood there beneath the two story machine and looked at Yvonne, questioningly. Under normal operating conditions, the Chronoperceptor produced prismatic colors in the atmosphere accompanied by weird harmonic effcts that sounded like music from another world. But now the tempo of color change and sound had increased startlingly. The colors brightened insistently at the visual extremes of red and violet, and the sound was like the maddened scream of a living giant. Above it all, an alarm bell rang.

"What is it?" yelled Kent to his sister. "Do you know what it's supposed to mean?"

She motioned him toward the mental tape machine, signifying that Germain's own instructions might be of some help in this case, and Kent lost no time in following her suggestion. Both of them had read the tapes several times, but so much of it had been so incomprehensible that they had given up trying to interpret it.

Before he could finish adjusting the cathode helmet of the tape reader to his head, however, the Chronoperceptor spoke to them.

"Look at the screen," it said, in a bellowing voice. "What you see is the future, one hour hence."

A panel slid away on the face of the machine and they beheld for the first time a screen which gave them a three dimensional image of a scene that brought a scream to Yvonne's lips.

They saw nothing but flame and

chaos and pieces of Earth flying in all directions. They saw the moon slip from its orbit and start its fall toward the sun. They were aware of millions of shattered or bloated bodies of human beings and animals drifting dead through space.

"It—it's the end of the world!" exclaimed Kent.

"Mother of Heaven!" cried Yvonne. "Don't let it happen!"

The machine robot continued speaking to them. "Owing to the nature of the entire Space-Time continuum, tampering with time and its interconnected chains of Cause and Effect is prohibited. However, in such an emergency as this it may be left to humans to decide what to do in regard to the salvation of their own planet. As a robot built by the Elders I cannot make a move to tamper with the future, but you could take that responsibility onto yourselves. I am only to warn you that even if your alteration of the immediate future should save the Earth it will establish a structure of probabilities which never existed before. If you wish to accept this responsibility in the name of the civilization which you represent, you are at liberty to activate the Time Aura that now encircles this world and all that is associated with it for a distance of approximately five thousand miles outward from its surface."

The colors and the sounds had subsided during this speech, and another panel slid back, disclosing a control panel to their view which was at once incredible and self-explanatory. There was a vernier control, a simple toggle switch, and a large lever. Obviously, Germain had worked on this panel, himself, because there were nameplates in English. Everywhere else on the Elder equipment any nameplates or decals bore incomprehensible symbols. The nameplate on this panel said: TIME AURA—*operate only on instructions from robot.* The vernier scale indicated hours. Beneath the vernier the toggle switch was mounted between two small decals saying *Future* and *Past.* The large lever was apparently a switch, because its decals merely said "On" and "Off."

To both humans who stood there looking at the panel, the silence in the room was worse than the noise that had preceded it.

"Michael!" exclaimed Yvonne, looking at her brother with widened eyes. "What should we do?"

Kent sweated. "There's so damned little time," he complained. "If that thing can throw the whole planet into the future or the past—Wait a minute!" He approached the panel, speculatively. Gingerly, he touched the vernier control, turning it experimentally. He set it twenty-four hours back. Then he snapped the switch to *Past.* "If we can go back to yesterday at this time," he said, "we will have that much more time to figure something out."

"Oh Michael, I—I don't know. We're playing with things that are so far beyond us—"

"The end of the world isn't far beyond us," he warned. "Something has to be tried, and fast! Germain wouldn't have set this thing going if he hadn't foreseen the possibility of its being needed. The thing's all set. I'm going to pull the switch!" Fearing that further meditation might result in a change of mind, he yanked the lever to the "On" position . . . .

THE Time Aura actually consisted of a thin layer of electrons, far out from Earth but enclosing it completely. Those electrons were in very rapid motion, approaching the speed of light. Suddenly, the spherical vortex which they composed spun beyond the speed of light, and Three Dimensional Nature rejected the entire envelope, throwing it along the only coordinate where any one thing can exist in two places at once—Time. With the envelope went the Earth, which it contained.

Earth changed position on its orbit. It now occupied a place where it had been twenty-four hours previously. Its satellite, which was not contained within the Aura, was lost. Detached from the age-old centripetal chains that had held it, it began to drift into the grip of Sol.

But to Earth's inhabitants the only thing that had changed was that the moon was gone. Other than that single, titanic event, they were aware of only a few minor phenomena such as a temporary epidemic of ordinary earthquakes and tidal waves, followed by a complete cessation of the tides.

Michael Kent and Yvonne wondered, too, about the moon's strange antics, and they feared for the fate of the Lunar Interstellar civilization existing within its interior. But they were unaware that they had caused this change, inasmuch as they now had almost twenty-four hours to wait before the alarm bell would ring on the Chronoperceptor. To them, their activating the Time Aura was an unknown event in the future.

Inasmuch as the Zero Bomb lay within the Time Aura, it, too, was thus automatically set back twenty-four hours. To the rest of the solar system, Earth was one day late. Its effects were felt on all the minor planets, and Jupiter lost two of its moons in the changing stresses of gravitational imbalances. On the sun, new sunspots swirled angrily and solar prominences licked out a hundred thousand miles in protest against the unprecedented event.

While in another plane of existence even greater chaos ensued . . . .

* * *

THE U.P. Bomb proved to be faster than the Nrlanian warship following it, but magnetic energy is propagated at the speed of light, and the bomb's three passen-

gers were aware of being exposed to the enemy's dis-rays. The bomb's screen was proof against meteors and other physical objects, but not against energy-propagation weapons. So as they sped so fast toward Deimos that it grew in their eyes with appalling rapidity, they wondered why they had not been snuffed out already.

"Rocky," said Germain, in a constrained tone of voice that showed rare emotion. "We can't outrun that thing. There's only one alternative left."

"If you mean what I've been hoping you don't—" began the other.

"There's no other choice," retorted Germain. "If we pass Deimos and race into outer space, the Nrlanian will knock us off at a distance, anyway, and Central Control will continue. With our fleets out of the running and only a small part of the Guardsmen on Mars, the enemy can take over the solar system. Civilization is more important than we are."

"But you can't mean—!" Janice started to exclaim.

"I do!" shouted Germain. "Knock Deimos out of existence!"

The bomb hurtled toward the outer moon, but Rocky's great hands gripped the controls tensely, undecided, eyes glaring at death. "Hell, let's take a chance!" he protested. "We might get out of it and live to come back at Deimos later. Those robots' guns may be stuck!"

"*We* are expendable," insisted Germain. "As your Star Warden I command you to ram Deimos!"

Janice made a last, desperate appeal. "If nothing else, Germain, think of Lil, and—and—"

"My wife," said Germain, "is *on* Deimos . . . "

Janice gasped audibly but was at a loss for words. The calm of death was already settling on Rocky's mind. "If that's the way you see it," he said, grimly, "I hope to God you're sure there's no other way—because here goes! It was great while it lasted. Everything, that is . . . " He reached behind him and squeezed Janice's knee.

In the instant before they reached their target, they were aware of the sudden arrival of another ship on the scene. They recognized it as Borg's special laboratory ship, which was battle geared almost as heavily as a Guardsman warship. They knew it had no time to fire at the pursuing Nrlanian ship, but they could see it trying to cover their bomb with its secondary screen. Too late to change course. Too late to take advantage of the arrival of a friend. They hurtled toward death with Borg trying to make sure their sacrifice would not be in vain, trying to keep the enemy from detonating their vehicle before it hit its mark.

In the next instant, Deimos suddenly became a mist, then attenuated into nothingness. They shot through the space where it had been.

"What the—" Rocky began, but

was cut off by an urgent communication from Borg.

"Coming alongside," he said. "Prepare for magnetic grappling. That's Guardsman equipment you're riding. Who are you?"

Rocky began to reply, but again Borg cut him short. "Thanks, Germain. Stand by with that telepathy. We may need it. Very little time . . "

As the lab ship came in close, they were aware of a beautiful pyrotechnical display about a half mile distant, like a displaced Aurora Borealis, and they knew that the Nrlanian vessel was playing havoc even with Borg's second order screen.

"All right, Germain," said Borg. "You've read my mind. Guide the others. Here we go!"

The U.P. bomb had by now fallen into the grip of the ship's magnetic grapplers and it came gently but firmly to rest against the hull. Suddenly, the stars around them began to fade and they seemed to be shooting into the depths of a luminous nebula.

"What gives!" shouted Rocky.

"Attenuate to normal density and Borg will do the rest." Germain's mind reached both his and Janice's. There was no time for telepathic communication in the form of word meanings. He only gave them a swift panorama of events which were now transpiring. Borg had discovered the secret of attenuation. They were attenuating now into the hidden plane where the Nrlani had taken Deimos and Central Control to save it from destruction. Evidently the Nrlanian robot controlled vessels from Mars were not equipped to follow, because this maneuver was definitely leaving their pursuer behind.

Rocky, irrepressible as ever, was about to say something when they suddenly attenuated to a point where the other plane came into focus. The action which ensued almost instantaneously after that first glimpse of what lay ahead was principally the result of Germain's quick mental grasp of the situation, his split-second decision, and his psychic control of every Terrestrial mind, both on the bomb and inside the ship. For that one, decisive instant, Germain's mind commandeered every control.

A broad countryside spread out before them, replete with barren looking mountains, a few small streams, and a meager growth of forest in several places. The whole scene was illuminated by a gigantic sun that glowed only with a pale, silvery light. So pale it was, in fact, that stars and other, closer celestial bodies could be seen beyond it. Germain took special note of a nebulous chain, like a tattered cloud, far out between them and the sun. Directly above them raced Deimos, receding outward into second order space. Directly below them spread a strange looking city composed of ancient stone buildings and tents and other, crystalline structures, all surrounded

by ancient pyramids. Some people, apparently Martians, lay face down in the streets, obviously terrorized by the sudden appearance of Deimos so close overhead.

But what occupied Germain's immediate attention, as well as Rocky's and Janice's and the others on board the lab ship, was that tremendous object which was suspended neither above nor below them but directly in their path. A huge, Nrlanian sky city, the defenses of which found them at point blank range, inasmuch as each was within the other's screens.

Such was the situation that had to be grasped and acted upon in a split-second if there was to be any chance for survival . . .

THE next thing Rocky and Janice knew, they were floating in space but drifting back toward Borg's ship, which was already densifying. As it did so, they, too, began to denisfy, and the scene before them began to be obscured by the luminous mists. But the last thing they saw was the U.P. bomb, sped on its way by Rocky at Germain's mental command. It drove straight toward the Nrlanian sky city, which started to move to avoid it, for even if there had been time to detonate it the explosion would still be effective. The Terrestrials knew it could not escape the bomb, and they pitied the residents of the strange city below.

They were only half way back to their own plane when they were buffeted by a gigantic hand and sent reeling along the borders of unconsciousness. It was a back-wash of the interplanar stresses created by the explosion of the U.P. bomb.

"Wow!" exclaimed Rocky. "That just about blew off my tatoos!"

Janice hugged him desperately in an effort to keep from getting lost in the mist, just as they both felt their feet touch the hull of Borg's ship.

AS Borg's ship materialized in normal space, approximately fourteen thousand miles above the surface of Mars, the outer airlock opened to receive the three space-suited figures that clung to its hull. They lost no time in entering the vessel, for two reasons. First, they were nearly out of oxygen. Secondly, they sighted three Nrlanian vessels which began to converge upon them immediately they made an appearance.

There was a third reason which Rocky refrained from mentioning under the circumstances. He was hungry . . .

Borg and Grange and the Agarthian crew were a welcome sight to the three adventurers, but there was not even time for handclasps, much less for conversation or a discussion of the unprecedented experience they had just shared. Just now there was a space battle to attend to.

Germain took command, with Rocky, Borg, Grange and Janice at his side.

They recognized their original enemy, as all three ships were of a slightly different size and type, although having in common a distinctly Nrlanian design. The largest ship, a stranger, appeared to hover over the scene as though undecided. The medium sized Nrlanian warship they had first encountered, however, came charging in with the full power of its ray weapons concentrated upon the Terrestrials' secondary screen, and again space was filled with the pyrotechnics resulting from opposed fields of force. The third Nrlanian vessel was much smaller than the other two but apparently packed more than ordinary power, because it remained boldly within battle range and, in fact, slowly closed in.

Just as Germain was about to try a dangerous combination of inner and outer screen frequencies in order to get through with a heat ray, the smaller Nrlanian flier drew in close to the Nrlanian warship, inside its screen, and in the next instant it had blasted its fellow out of existence.

"Well I'll be kicked to death —" Rocky started to exclaim.

"That flier is manned by friendly allies," observed Germain, quickly. "Hail them!"

In another moment they had Sam Turner on the visiscreen. Rocky greeted him with a whoop of joy and started to interrogate him. Turner was brief and to the point. They were on Eidelmann's trail. That large ship above them *was* Eidelmann. He was using the ship which he had built in Russia for Nicholas.

"Wait a minute!" interrupted Germain. "If that's Nicholas' ship, where is Nicholas?"

Sam Turner grinned. "Strange that I forgot to give you the good news," he said. "Old Nick is dead!"

Exclamations started, but Germain waved his hand for silence. His dark eyes glared intently at Turner's image on the screen. "Where and when did he die?" he demanded to know. "I mean, was it before or after he entered his ship?"

Turner raised a quizzical brow, puzzled. "He got it before he reached his ship. Here—" He turned and pulled Trinha into the field of vision. "See this little Martian gal? She's Earth's first Martian ally. Nick and Pavlovich brought her to Earth. She had a beef with Nick and followed him back here. When she saw her chance, she shot him down."

Janice and Rocky looked at Trinha with both interest and admiration, but Germain seemed to be extraordinarily excited. His hand trembled as he adjusted the visiscreen's focus control.

"Do you know what that means?" he asked? "At the moment Nicholas was shot he was moving under my own hypnotic control. He was to have deactivated the Zero-Bomb!"

*"Himmel!"* exclaimed Janice, inadvertently lapsing into her native German. Her hand went to her lips and she stared at Rocky.

"That might explain the strange actions of Earth's satellite," remarked Borg. "We have observed that it is falling toward the sun. However, Earth seems to be intact."

Again, Germain waved them all to silence. "Friends, some of the threads of rhyme and reason have come unraveled in physical nature. I am afraid that the Chronoperceptor on Guam has gone into action." None of them, with the exception of Borg, knew what the Chronoperceptor was, so Germain continued. "Elder Race equipment. It would have been able to foresee the destruction of Earth by the Zero Bomb and guide Yvonne in activating the Time Aura which it generates. Earth has been thrown backward in time. It is late on its orbit, which would explain the moon's present actions. But there is something else—" He was remembering the nebulous chain he observed in the firmament of that other plane where they had encountered the Nrlanian sky city. His eyes widened in horror. "Earth's own secondary plane!" he exclaimed. "Like the moon, it has become displaced. Physical Earth changed position on its orbit, but the higher plane, deprived of its denser center, must now be dissolving!"

"Pardon me, sir," said Turner. "You're quite a bit ahead of me. One thing I can understand is that Eidelmann is right on top of you. He's dangerous and specially equipped. Hadn't we better—"

"No! For God's sake don't destroy that ship!" exclaimed Germain. "It contains the remote controls of the Zero Bomb! If we can deactivate the bomb, the Chonoperceptor will not go into action again. Otherwise, periodically, Earth will backtrack on its orbit and eventually unbalance the whole solar system! We've got to capture Eidelmann. Wait! Drive inside his secondary screen," he ordered Borg. "Once inside, I'll take him mentally. It's our only chance!"

"And a long one," commented Rocky. "He probably packs Universal Power."

Borg's ship moved swiftly. When Eidelmann saw it coming inside his screen, he was about to fire a disray when he became aware of Germain. In sudden fear, he moved another control, instead.

Whereupon, they saw his ship suddenly attenuate and disappear.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Rocky. "He's got an attenuator, too!"

"Very brilliant man," commented Dr. Grange, rubbing his nose. "He deduced its possibility independently—and succeeded! A parallel discovery, Dr. Borg!"

"Do you know where he's going?" put in Janice. "He's after Central Control!"

"What are we waiting for?" asked Borg.

Germain glanced at Rocky. "Can you answer that question?" he asked him.

Rocky's healthy brain clicked furiously for a moment. Then he grinned. "I think it would be a good idea for me to get transferred over to Turner's ship and get back to Stierman's task force on Mars. From there we convert our densifiers and prepare for Project Heaven. *Nicht wahr?*" He looked at Janice. "I take it Germain is piloting this wagon back into the upper plane to haggle with Eidelmann over Central Control, and in the meantime there'll be some Nrlanians up there to take care of. That's where we come in—the Guardsmen, that is . . . "

Germain smiled faintly in appreciation. "Correct deduction so far," he said. "Remember this. That Nrlanian sky city we blasted was smaller than the main one I contacted before. Friends, I have a hypothesis that, if true, calls for a supreme effort."

They waited for him to continue speaking, but instead he engaged them mentally. With the swiftness of thought, devoid of words, he implanted in their minds a concept. Relative densities. Earth, the crude, dense matter at the base of Nature's fractionating column. Then, higher levels of rarer matter. More attenuated planes where, all things being relative, life went on within the scope of its own reality. Lastly, there would be the rarest substance, composing the highest plane, which he referred to with a word—Etherea. In the latter plane were the great and ancient ones, and above and beyond them, the Unattainable. The spheres of influence of these latter were so tremendous, perhaps, that they could only take cognizance of the denser planes periodically, say once every three to five thousand years. In the meantime, the lesser planes, such as the one they had just visited, had to shift for themselves. Each planet would be surrounded with one of these secondary planes. Here Germain interposed another word—Atmospherea. These could be referred to as the "local" Heavens. Ergo, they had just visited the Martians' "local" Heaven. And Earth's secondary plane, deprived of its denser center, was falling apart.

Germain placed emphasis on one outstanding idea. Suppose that the Nrlani, seeking a positive hiding place from the Elder People while they prepared for invasion of the solar system over the period of several thousand years, had moved into these lower planes and conquered them without the knowledge of the Great Ones in outer Etherea? This would explain Earth's excessive tendency toward moral and social decadence, inasmuch as a Heaven in bondage would act as a barrier in the way of Man's awareness of higher purpose. It would dull Man's secondary or "spiritual" senses, leaving him the victim of animalism.

"In short," Germain concluded, verbally, "our mission seems to be

an emancipation of the lower Heavens, both of Mars and of Earth."

Rocky shook his head to clear it. "If we're all batty," he said, "let's just keep it to ourselves. In the meantime, what about Central Control? If you could get into it, you might be able to call off the discs and all the robot fleets. With the rest of my fleet free, not to mention the Lunars and the Agarthians, we might be able to do something, even if the home of the Lunars is going to blazes."

In that moment, Germain's subconscious mind seemed to click, and the answer to all his troublesome deliberations popped up. As a result, he staggered, eyes wide, staring at nothingness, as segment after segment of his past observations fell into place, all focussed upon a tremendous conclusion.

"What's the matter, Stephen?" asked Janice, solicitously.

He groped, found Rocky's massive shoulder, sought support. "Let's get going on all these plans," he said. "Rocky and Janice, transfer to Turner's vessel. Start your Martian task force to converting their densifying equipment and send them on our trail as soon as each ship is ready. Then watch the Nova for signs of life, in case I get to Central Control. Once I do get there, I may be able to— to—"

"To what?" asked Borg.

"Never mind. Let's get going. Lillian is in Central Control, and she may be out of oxygen if Izdran's threat means anything . . . "

AFTER Rocky and Janice had been transferred to Turner's ship and Germain started the lab vessel through the process of attenuation again, Doctors Borg and Grange looked at each other and knew they were both thinking the same thing. Germain, sitting between them at the controls, knew what they were thinking, because it was a logical reaction.

"The most unusual part of all this," said Borg, "is that we haven't taken time to consider what repercussions will ensue on Earth after it has been discovered that there is physical proof of human duality and continuation in the next plane of existence—that Man actually has a higher purpose to achieve."

Dr. Grange reflectively rubbed his nose. "The effects upon human thought and behavior resulting from the findings of such men as Kepler, Galileo, Darwin and Einstein pale into insignificance by comparison with this. This will be a moral-psychological earthquake. It will be the end of *Blind* Faith. The Passive part of mysticism will become Dynamic. It will be tantamount to a mass mutation. We will become, in effect, a new species of Man. Dynamic Spiritual Man."

"Perhaps," said Germain. "Just now we must concentrate on the emergency at hand. Look! We have arrived again!"

They looked upon the Martian secondary plane once more, and the sight which now met their eyes caused them to fall silent for a long moment. Where there had been a city on the ground before there was a vast, deep crater, still smouldering from the effects of the blast created by the U.P. bomb. The Nrlanian sky city had not been vaporized entirely. Tell-tale shattered remnants of it lay across the landscape, giving them proof positive that it had been violently destroyed. Beyond, in the pale firmament of this plane, swung Deimos, apparently some ten thousand miles distant.

"That," said Germain, crisply, "is our immediate goal." His tightly compressed lips were an obvious signal to the two scientists that he did not wish to discuss the fact that to destroy the Nrlani innocent inhabitants of this second plane of existence had to be sacrificed. Whether or not the remaining people here would understand their motives or become their enemies there was no time to think about. Out there was Deimos, Central Control, Lillian Germain—and Eidelmann—not to mention the fact that this whole action was undoubtedly undergoing a jaundiced surveillance by Izdran, himself.

Thoughts of Izdran put Germain in mind of several interesting facts. The Martian secondary plane was removed from the primary planet's surface by some fourteen thousands of miles. Earth was larger than Mars. Germain calculated swiftly, taking volume and increased mass into consideration. Hypothetically, he could place Earth's secondary plane at about the fifty thousand mile level. It had been at that level that he had detected the main Nrlanian sky city, immersed in secondary invisibility. Izdran was master of the solar systems secondary planes. That chain-like group of nebulous patches he could observe out there in space from his present position was all that was left of Earth's secondary plane. Perhaps even now Izdran was approaching him with the intentions of engaging him in direct, physical conflict.

"For some reason," said Borg, "it appears that while Central Control is in this plane the discs cannot be controlled. You will note that there are no discs here. Perhaps they cannot attenuate entirely into this plane. Nature has enabled them merely to utilize the intervening levels of attenuation as a means of self-protection."

"I hope you are right," said Germain. "That would enable Rocky to clean up the Nova and some of the other ships and get more of the fleet back into operation. Our task is not simple. We need all the help we can get, not only in this plane but our own, as well. There is Mars to take care of, and there are rescue operations concerning the Lunar Interstellars living inside the moon, not to mention all the units of their

fleet and of the Agarthian fleet. Time, fighting power, equipment and men are vital."

DEIMOS now loomed before them, cold, airless, dark. It was only dimly illuminated by the light of the sun. Strangely enough, they encountered no protective energy screens surrounding it.

"Don't let that fool you," admonished Germain. "I've tried out my ESP here and found a psychic screen. This has all the earmarks of a booby trap—designed especially for yours truly!"

"Evidently Eidelmann doesn't suspect booby traps," said Grange. "Look! He has already landed!"

Far below them they could make out the circular Nrlanian type vessel which contained the controls for the Zero Bomb. It rested on the surface of Deimos near another object which became a great source of surprise to all observers on the lab ship. There on the arid, airless surface of Mars' outer moon was an ancient stone pyramid of unusual dimensions. It towered massively above Eidelmann's ship.

"That substantiates one of my suppositions," said Germain. "Ever since I examined one of those flying Martian gas pods I wondered if the ancient Martian priests of the moon gods hadn't discovered the real secret of the pods. Those pods are much heavier than air. They overcome gravitation through some sort of cross-polarization in their crystalline structure. The priests must have developed this principle and traveled to the satellites. Here, long ago, they set up their Holy of Holies. I daresay it was they who set up the original booby trap, right in that pyramid, making it impossible for any but a Martian to enter—which hints also at the historical probability of unpleasant visitations by the Nrlani in the old days when their planet was still intact. So Izdram had Martian drones or mental slaves set up Central Control for him, inside that ancient temple pyramid. He made sure that only the conditioned Martians ever got to Deimos. Intruders from any other planet would be snuffed out by the original booby trap, whatever it is."

"Interesting, if true," said Borg. "Let us hope that Eidelmann is not possessed of your powers of deduction."

"I suppose the Nrlanians could throw up defensive screens if they thought we were on a mission of destruction," remarked Germain, "but they evidently think I'm incapable of blasting the place because of the presence of my wife there. They expect me to walk into their trap—and maybe I shall."

Borg looked at Grange. Then they both stared at Germain. "What are you talking about?" asked Grange.

"Never mind. Look! There's Eidelmann out there in a space suit! He was almost to the pyramid when he spotted us. He's making it back toward his ship. We've got to get into

that ship and take over the Zero Bomb controls!"

"I see him," said Borg, watching the televiewer. "Now he has stopped. He knows he can't get there before us."

"He also knows he's exposed to our fire," said Grange. "Look at him run, back toward the pyramid! Or rather, I should say he's hopping like a kangaroo in that light gravity."

Then all three of them saw the tiny, space-suited figure pause on a rise of ground before the temple doors and raise his dis-gun. He aimed it at his own ship.

Germain grimaced, then fired at Eidelmann. He was traveling too fast and maneuvering for a landing at the same time, so he missed him. A vacant area of the moon's surface two thousand feet from Eidelmann smouldered darkly and became a shallow lake of lava. In the same instant, Eidelmann's ship was blasted into wreckage. Eidelmann looked up at them briefly, then ducked into the temple.

"I follow his reasoning," said Germain. "He feels that once he gets control of what's inside he'll be master of the Solar System."

"But—the Zero Bomb!" exclaimed Grange. "The controls have been destroyed!"

"That was a probability I have had to consider," replied Germain. "Now there is only one course left open."

"And that is?" queried Borg.

"Let's go see what happened to Eidelmann," Germain said, evading the question.

"And to your wife," put in Grange.

"My damned seventh sense is usually too late with too little," said Germain. "Now I suddenly have the feeling that Lillian is no longer there. I gather that Izdran has become impressed by the real danger of his position. What better defense against me than to hold my wife as hostage? I wouldn't be surprised if she were now a prisoner in his own sky city, nor would I be surprised to see that city any time now."

TEN minutes after the ship had landed, Germain, Borg, Grange and ten Agarthian spacemen stood at the entrance to the ancient pyramid. A gigantic archway led into somber gloom. Over that archway, Germain observed the meteor scarred remains of ancient heiroglyphics that caused his blood to race.

He paused, still looking up at those markings, while all the tag ends of his past observations suddenly dove-tailed neatly together. An eager gleam was creeping into his deepset, dark eyes when the others urged him onward, reminding him that Eidelmann was somewhere ahead of them. A faint smile played about his lips as he entered the ancient temple of the Martian moon worshippers.

Several ray men remained on the

outside, ready to disintegrate any portal that might fall behind the others. Two other Agarthian spacemen led the way with powerful searchlights. There was also other equipment that probed the passage ahead with radar, tested the place for harmful radiations and photographed it in ranges of light above and below the physical spectrum.

"What about that psychic screen?" queried Dr. Grange. "Still blocking your extra-sensory perception?"

"It's there," replied Germain. "But it no longer recedes as I advance. My ESP takes me down three different passages ahead. In two passages there is no screen, but there is death in several primitive forms. One is a simple drop-off into the center of the satellite. Another contains an ancient trap constructed of two stone walls that will come together and crush any intruder. That passage leads to a dead end. But the third takes me to Eidelmann. Just beyond him is the psychic screen. I read in his mind that he is mystified by a wall of flame there. He is hurriedly making tests of it to see if it will harm him. I believe that there is a real trap and the real entrance to Central Control, where the temple's Holy of Holies used to be. Eidelmann is armed only with a dis-gun. Let's combine our portable generator outputs and I think we can take him without a struggle."

Germain was referring to protective energy screens which their space outfits could produce. Under a combined output that protected them frontally they advanced down a curving passageway which Germain indicated as the correct one.

"Why don't you paralyze Eidelmann?" asked Borg.

"Just as I was about to, back there a second ago, he stepped further into the passage. He is now beyond the psychic screen and I can't reach him. Whether or not he is in some way aware of that protection I don't know. I guess he is quite a clever and treacherous character. Let's watch him carefully. Take no chances. When he is within range, suffocate him with heat ray, but don't burn him. I'd like to question him if he can be taken prisoner."

They rounded a corner abruptly and came within sight of Eidelmann, who fired at them instantly. When he failed to penetrate their screen he desisted, as though he had expected such resistance. But he laughed at them when they tried to ray him back. He, too, had a screen, more powerful than theirs. For the first time Germain became cognizant of the neat generator pack on his shoulders and the screen propagation antenna above his helmet.

He was vividly silhouetted against a curtain of cold flame that blocked any possible view of what lay beyond. Germain's sharp eyes detected a crystalline frame around the flame, and again he smiled faintly,

remembering the heiroglyphics he had seen at the temple's entrance.

"What's holding you up, Eidelmann?" queried Germain. "Want us to rush you?"

"Just a little preparation," replied the latter. "That flame is a real death trap, as you have probably surmised. But I foresaw something of the kind and came prepared, whereas you did not. My screen is a block to *all* primary energy except electro-magnetic propagations on the ten meter band necessary for our present communication, and light waves in the normal spectrum. This flame is primary. So it seems that only I may enter here. I thought it only fair to pause here long enough to warn you that to follow me will be suicide."

"Your concern for our safety is touching," replied Germain. "Furthermore, we are very much impressed. Why don't you enter Central Control, Eidelmann?"

The German scientist could be seen behind his faceplate, because his face glistened brightly with perspiration. He adjusted several controls at his waist, nervously.

"Go ahead, Eidelmann," urged Germain. "If your genius has prevailed against the science of the ancients, what have you to fear?"

"Ancients?" said Eidelmann. "What are you talkng about? This is a camouflaged Nrlanian installation."

"On the contrary," countered Germain. "The ancient Martian priests overcame gravitation and were able to traverse space. They set this up on the basis of a science unknown to you. They set up this trap originally to keep the Nrlanians, themselves, out. Only Martians can pass through that trap. You'll never make it, Eidelmann!"

Eidelmann hesitated. "What makes you think *you* can?" he said. Then a new thought struck him. He thought he knew what Germain might be thinking. Experimentally, he turned his dis-gun on the wall and fired, point-blank. A thin patina of age-old space dust disappeared instantly before the blast, revealing a wall of gleaming crystal.

"You will carve no path around the trap, my friend," said Germain. "The ancients sought every means possible to make this place proof against the Nrlani, or anyone else, for that matter."

Eidelmann stared incredulously at the unyielding crystal. "How is that possible?" he cried. "The dis gun neutralizes proton cohesion!"

"I believe you have before you a curious material blend of primary and secondary matter, the one pinch-hitting for the other, whichever is damaged first—and the stuff probably heals automatically. You can't disintegrate the walls."

"But—if the Nrlanians can't enter here, how did they—"

"They used post-suggestion. They had Martian slaves who were ment-

ally conditioned to carry out their instructions. They controlled them also, no doubt, by means of augmented telepathy or some form of ESP. I repeat, Eidelmann, only a Martian can enter here. So give yourself up or we'll have to rush you. Which shall it be?"

Germain signalled to his companions and they began to close in on the German. The latter fired a dis blast at them, futilely.

"Stop!" he yelled. "Central Control is mine!" Whereupon, he plunged into the cold curtain of flame.

As he did so, they saw him become a cloud of dust, which settled slowly to the floor of the passage.

"I must say," said Borg, apathetically, "that this trap presents a problem. How *are* we going to get through?"

Instead of an answer, he was met with silence. Everyone was still looking at the dust that but a moment before had been Gerhardt Eidelmann.

"Another question, please," persisted Borg. "After what we have observed here isn't it logical to conclude that Lillian never was here in the first place?"

"I believe that is true," said Germain. "There was no possible way for her to enter. She must have been with Izdran all along and he hid the knowledge from me."

"Then I repeat—how are *we* going to get through this trap?"

"Men," said Germain to all of them, "don't follow me, because you can't. You are not going through that barrier, but I think I am. If I don't succeed, you'd better prepare to defend yourselves against Izdran. I feel he is near."

Borg's gnarled hand, hard and bony even through his space mitt, detained Germain. "What are you thinking of?" he asked. "Is it autoportation? The psychic screen would prevent that, wouldn't it?"

"That's precisely why it's there," replied Germain. "The Nrlani foresaw that possibility. They no doubt deduced how I escaped from the Nova. No, I am going to *walk* through."

"Over my dead—" Borg started to say, but he stopped talking when Germain's mind gripped his, momentarily paralyzing him.

Without further ceremony, Germain walked through the flame . . .

THERE was no time for exclamations on the part of those who remained behind the barrier, inasmuch as they all received an urgent call from the lab ship. A giant Nrlanian sky city had put in its appearance.

"Izdran!" exclaimed Borg. "Just as Germain predicted! Well, he's on his own in there. There's nothing we can do but get back to the ship."

They left the temple, on the double. When they emerged, they saw the Nrlanian city approaching them cautiously from out of secondary

space. Borg and Grange detected the telltale faint aurora above them which indicated that the Agarthian operators had set up their defensive screens, both primary and secondary.

"Hold fire!" ordered Borg to the ship. "Lillian Germain may a hostage there."

"Too late!" came the Agarthian's reply, as Borg and his men approached the airlock. "We've launched our U.P. bomb!"

Even as this news reached Borg's ears, he and his companions were almost blinded by a tremendous flash that lighted all secondary space as far as they could see. The Nrlani had detonated the bomb in mid flight, but as it was separated from Deimos by hundreds of miles of vacuum they did not suffer from the effects of the blast.

"What are your orders?" came the Agarthian officer's voice from the bridge of the lab ship, as Borg and Grange and the rest reached the airlock.

"There may be nothing to do but surrender or run for it," said Borg, "unless—"

"Sir! The Guardsmen are here!" The officer in charge lost the calm which was required of Agarthian neophytes such as he. "They are emerging from primary space! I see three ships, five—ten! They are coming fast!"

Borg and Grange and some of the Agarthian spacemen with them all paused, before closing the airlock behind them, to peer outward into space in the direction of the Martian secondary plane far below Deimos, but they could see nothing at that distance.

"Do you think they see the Nrlanian city?" asked Borg.

"They are heading this way fast!" was the reply.

"Then signal them not to attempt destruction of the enemy. Ask them if Janice Maine is among them. If so, she'll have to rig up heterodyners and project the paralysis beam on higher harmonics until she gets the Nrlanian mental frequency." Germain had discussed his psychic hetterodyner briefly with Borg, and the idea came to him now as the only possible weapon to use. "Tell her Lillian Germain may be in the Nrlanian city. Nrlani will have to be taken without violence, if possible. In the meantime—all screens out on Universal Power. I think the U.P. generators can draw as much energy from secondary as they can from primary space, now that they have reached relative attenuation. Pool all energy transmission into a concentrated screen and go on defensive until the harmonic generators can be rigged. We'll join them now."

The lab ship had no sooner taken off from Deimos than the satellite was suddenly bathed in a greenish fire. That this phenomenon had its source in the approaching sky city

was evidenced by a needle beam of greenish light emanating from the vast fortress. As a result, Deimos literally began to fall apart.

"Screen that!" cried Borg, who had now reached the control room. "Intercept that beam!"

They did intercept it successfully, although their screens literally exploded with light and color at the impact. Deimos was only half a moon now, but they could still make out the pyramid that housed Central Control. Its outer patina of ages had been burned clean, and they observed that the whole structure was composed of the indestructible crystal substance discovered by the ancients.

The Nrlanian city moved swiftly, closer, dodging their screen, trying to get in another shot at Deimos. But just then Deimos, itself, began to densify, and as it did so it appeared to be surrounded by a luminous mist.

"Germain has succeeded!" exclaimed Grange. "He's taking Deimos back into primary space!"

"I'd still like to know how he got through that barrier curtain of cold fire—quick! Don't let the Nrlani follow him!" Borg drew their attention to the fact that the huge sky city was also densifying.

By this time, ten Guardsman vessels swept into view and surrounded their objective with every screen they had, including the combined effects of their attenuators. All screens sparkled with color as the enemy sought to resist them, but the latter's attenuation ceased.

"Borg!" came Steve Rockner's voice over the codawave speakers. "Janice is here but too busy to talk! What do you think we've been doing—star-gazing? Germain told us all about that heterodyning business and we've practically got it rigged up on the paralysis beams! I think we can hold this hot potato here, but it's a good thing we can all put out psychic screens. Otherwise those Nrlanian devils could get at us mentally. You'd better get back to Primary and give Germain a hand. The whole Solar System is falling apart! Earth has slipped another cog and now Mars looks like it's losing its orbit. Haven't you noticed an increase in rotation of this plane? No time, I guess. If you've got any miracles up your sleeve—"

"How many Guardsmen ships are coming through?" asked Borg, quickly.

"Just the Martian task force, all I could spare—about twenty-four ships. The rest have their hands full with Fortress Mars, although the surface natives are giving a hand now. We freed the Nova and it's making the rounds working on others, but those discs hang on like glue. Unless Germain can get hold of Central Control—"

"Germain is now the master of Central Control," replied Borg.

"Thank God!" said Rocky. "And

I *do* mean that! It's our only hope and yet I don't see how even Germain can help now."

"Hold the Nrlani at bay if you can," said Borg. "We're going to follow Germain."

"We have only begun to fight!"

"Okay, Admiral Perry," cut in Stierman's voice from another Guardsman ship. "This isn't any fireman's picnic. What do we do now?"

"You asked for it!" came Rocky's reply. "Have you got any suggestions?"

Just as Borg's ship began to fade out of Secondary, Borg and Grange and a few of the others observed a change in the Nrlanians' tactics. The sky city suddenly became the center of a glass-like bubble, miles in diameter, and as the bubble appeared, the Guardsman ships surrounding it were literally propelled away from it, as though they had been struck by a giant hand.

There was no time to wait and observe more. The watchers could only pray that ultimate victory would be theirs—that the remaining Guardsman units would join the embattled force that Rocky now headed. Swiftly, they densified and were soon surrounded by the interplanar mists . . .

* * *

GERMAIN'S seventh sense told him that the time had arrived which would be *the* focal point of modern history. It was the time of the Miracles—*his* miracle. If he did not succeed there was liable to be no further history, either in the primary or secondary planes of existence within the confines of the Solar System.

Central Control was a miniature Nrlanian city built into the great pyramid, which he had finally entered through airlocks. The latter had been easily workable inasmuch as the main lock on the whole place was the barrier flame. Beyond that, it had been the Nrlani's intention to give simple ingress to the Martian slaves who served them.

He found a few Martians on hand —mentally conditioned slave city Martians. Since he had penetrated the psychic screen by simply walking through it, he could use his mental powers at will, and this he proceeded to do so as the small Martian view attending the titanic machinery of Central Control turned upon him with various weapons. He promptly reconditioned their minds to serve him. He also read their minds and gained valuable information quickly. At once he earned that Lillian had never been here. Undoubtedly, then, Izdran still held her captive, if she was alive at all.

First of all, he made use of the fact that the installation was, among other things, a tremendously powerful space ship equipped with densifying and attenuating apparatus.

It was fully capable of moving the entire satellite. This he proceeded to do. It was when the Nrlanian green fire struck that he turned on the densifiers. He noted that the temperature inside Central Control rose to almost one hundred and forty degrees Fahrenheit, in spite of its screens, and the Martians fainted.

After reaching primary space, however, they soon revived, to watch him in rapt silence as he proceeded. By means of giant visiscreens he was able to orientate himself and bring what remained of Deimos halfway between Earth and Mars. Then he turned his attention to Central Control, proper.

Its appearance was roughly that of a gigantic cybernetic machine, approximately four hundred feet on a side and ten stories deep. Small magnetic elevators gave physical access to all levels whereas multiple control panels gave electronic or wave-transmission access to every section. Utilizing his knowledge gained from the Martian's minds, in combination with his ESP and experience with Elder Race science, he quickly analyzed the general arrangement and purpose of the installation. That he had voluntary access to the prodigious powers of his own subconsciousness made his mutant mentality, in itself, a calculating machine which equalled or surpassed the ability and complications of Central Control. By extra-sensory extension he could, in effect, engulf the entire installation within the scope of his mind to a point where, by considerable concentration, it acquired his faculties and simultaneously lent its own to his.

There were memory banks replete with knowledge sacred to the Nrlanian race—the history and science of thousands of years' accumulation. In mere minutes he was staggering, mentally, with the burden of a personality that was not individual, but ethnic. It was as though he were no longer a Terrestrial man, but a whole alien race.

Most important of all, there was a three story section of control cells numbering some fifty million. Each of these controlled one of the flying discs. By virtue of his newly acquired knowledge he was aware of how the mysterious creatures of the void had been trapped, conditioned and tied, psychically, to Central Control in such a manner that the mere whim of any single member of the Nrlanian race would be magnified fifty million times and be acted upon over a territory which encompassed the entire Solar System! Thus by means of this system of extension any Nrlanian could become a godlike being and hold a great work of Creation in the palm of his hand—the sun and all its worlds, to a point far beyond the orbits of Pluto. As an incidental piece of information he gathered that there were two more planets

beyond Pluto, small, frozen, lifeless. He noted that others were not so lifeless, but there was little time to concentrate on the torrent of knowledge that inundated his mind. Nor would he allow himself to be tempted by curiosity. Although Ganymede, being the source of *ca'ta*—

He willed himself to concentrate on the problem at hand. The discs—and the tottering Solar System. The falling Moon, with its burden of life inside—the whole civilization of the Lunar Interstellars. Earth, caught in a warp of time, upsetting the balance of everything with its erratic actions. Mars, toppling off its orbit. Earth's secondary plane, torn to shreds, disintegrating.

After some deliberation, he conceived of a method of blocking any possible mental contact by the Nrlanians, and then he learned how to take over the power of the discs, himself.

The first thing he did was to cause them to release all space vessels which they had attacked. This, in itself, enabled some two hundred and fifty vessels to come to life again and take part in the struggle to set Creation back on its feet. Sixty-five incapacitated Golden Guardsman vessels were soon to join their fellows in action, both on Mars and in secondary space. Twenty-five Agarthian behemoths would soon be turning their attention Earthward and taking Pavlovich's robot-controlled forces to task, under cover of secondary screens. And a hundred and sixty Lunar Interstellars were freed to divide into a number of special units, not least among which would be a large force engaged in the rescue of their own race, waiting helplessly within the Moon.

Then—at long last—Germain prepared to try his miracle. He was aware that he was assuming powers not intended for Man, yet the urgency of the whole situation seemed to justify the experiment. It was dangerous, inasmuch as he would be tampering with Time, just as the Chronoperceptor did. Therefore, he had to utilize the full capacities of his prodigious mentality in calculating the probability factors involved in half a dozen different combinations of Cause and Effect. Desperately, he sought a common denominator, a key Cause which would give the optimum desired effect with the minimum of undesirable new probabilities. And at last he thought of it—and hoped he was right!

For a moment, he reviewed the principle in his mind which had made autoportation possible for him. He recalled a conversation he had had with Mandir in Agarthi just before Pavlovich's attack.

"You have delved into auto-synthesis of *faith* power, haven't you? Not the religious sense of blind faith, but the basic, metaphysical nature of faith. One of its manifestations is levitation."

"Yes," Mandir had replied. "Twice I achieved levitation. The King did it easily. What are you getting at?"

"Faith power is based on the fact that any given set of results arises from a given set of causes and that, conversely, if the mind can perceive *as an absolute reality* a synthesized set of results for which there was no original cause, that *cause* will come into being in order to match the results . . . "

Then Germain recalled his encounter with a flying disc, alone, in his space suit, after escaping from the Nova. He carefully reviewed the results his subconscious mind had produced on that subject. The discs were pure mentality devoid of inhibiting fears of pre-conditionings. From there, where could his reasoning take him? The answer was: The discs were *perfect* media for the expression of faith. They would believe anything with a one hundred percent efficiency. In fact, what was implanted in them would be *reality*. Magnify that fifty million times and what did you have? A faith power to move worlds! In short, a miracle.

Through Central Control, Germain's mentality entered every disc in primary space, from the sun to Pluto and beyond. He drew the more distant ones inward and they came with the speed of light, gradually concentrating their powers.

He concentrated on one key thought, eliminating all other ideas from his mind, and that thought grew through those millions of racing discs and became a reality, a *faith fixation* that recognized a synthetic result that was *forced* to set up a set of causes in physical reality.

The key thought was: *The detonator on the Zero Bomb was a dud from the start.*

* * *

Cause: Faulty detonator. Result: no detonation. No possibility of an Earth destroying blast. No activation of the Chronoperceptor. No disruption of Earth's normal course along its orbit. No falling of the Moon or aberration of Mars. No disintegration of Earth's secondary plane. No earthquakes on Mars, no prominences on the sun, no shaking of other bodies of the Solar System.

But new probabilities precipitated set up new conditions elsewhere . . .

* * *

WITH no disruption of Earth's secondary plane, Fortress Heaven remained intact. Thus Izdran operated along a new channel of probabilities. He did not, as a matter of fact, have a chance to intercept the Golden Guardsmen before they were upon him. In the old pattern of normal effect, the Guardsman ships had been violently engaged in struggle with the Nrlanian sky city above the Martian secondary plane. Suddenly, they

were transplanted into a new pattern of probability without being aware of the change, because memory patterns were altered proportionately. Izdran, instead of coming to meet them, now remained in command back on Earth's secondary plane, which loomed in the firmament of secondary space as a silvery globe some hundred and eight thousand miles in diameter.

Stierman, impatient for the fight, put in a request for orders.

"What do you make of that globe?" Rocky asked him. He could not bring himself to call it either Earth, Heaven, or Atmospherea. He had the impression that neither he nor his companions nor any inhabitant of the primary plane of existence belonged here. He was aware of a subconscious urge to do his duty and get out. Caution and uncertainty in the face of the unknown struggled with a mounting tension within him, and he could see it in his companions. Definitely, it was not attributable to a fear of the Nrlania, but to something much greater which they dared not describe.

"Well," came Stierman's reply, "from what I can see in the televiewers around here I'd say there's sixty million inhabitants there if there is one. I've never dreamed of such large cities. None of them industrialized to speak of—but they're big!"

"And I'd say the Nrlani have had centuries to propagandize them and condition them just as they did in the case of the Martians—on both planes. Try to spare the inhabitants when we move in, boys. Let's approach in wide deployment and concentrate gradually on the Nrlani once we find them. Use the psychic heterodyner. That's a strictly secondary energy weapon and seems to be the only thing that can touch them. Let's go!"

More Guardsman ships had come through the "wall," as they called the interplanar mists, and soon over fifty of them were converging upon Earth's secondary plane. That they would meet with a bristling resistance on the part of the preconditioned inhabitants, also, they had little doubt.

During the ensuing days, still more units from the primary plane crossed over and joined them in their mounting battle, including the tremendous Nova, piloted by Germain, himself. Atmospherea was definitely in the hands of the few Nrlani who ruled from their sky city and fought back with appalling power and efficiency.

However, as in any other occupied country, a useful underground offered its services in the form of sabotage and revolt. The psychic heterodyner finally won out over Izdran, after actual months of intensive struggle. Aided by newly conditioned Agarthian and Lunar Interstellar units, the Guardsmen final-

ly caused the Nrlanian sky city to surrender, whereupon they promptly occupied it with forces representing Solar Government.

Those who were named in history as being present at the surrender and death of Izdran and his companions were Stephen Germain, Steven Rockner, Gregory Stierman and Samuel Turner. Weakened and paralyzed, mentally, by weeks of intensive psychic battle, Izdran offered no resistance as the four men advanced under multiple-purpose screens and gazed upon the Nrlanian's true form under the dome of his tower in the sky city.

Rocky, for one, knew he would never be able to describe such a creature, for how does one describe a *mutant* robot? — a mechanico-synthetic form of life that has branched partially into a true life form. Some of Izdran's living organisms, tied in with his robot faculties, were installed in other parts of the building! The city, itself, was a common body to the remaining four Nrlanians there, and no human observer could tell whose set of multiple hearts, or dual brains, or other organisms belonged to whom. It was beyond analysis. Through mental awareness, alone, Germain was able to identify the personality that was Izdran.

"Before you die," said Germain, "you will tell me where you have hidden my wife." Through signals to a hovering control ship above the battered city he was able to have some of the paralysis eased, and Izdran was able to speak.

Feebly, he laughed, "You will never find her," he replied. "Or if you do you will regret it! She *lives*, Germain! But where? You will never know!"

Germain's mind leaped out angrily and started again to probe deeply into Izdran, searching frantically through every recess of that multiple mind, but the recesses were many and the enemy's mental blocks required energy to break down while he remained conscious.

"Don't be naive," Izdran told him. "Now that defeat is upon us, ultimately and irrevocably, we die— before you can probe any further into any of us!"

Germain took a step forward, futilely. Through transparent panels he saw several great hearts slow to a stop. And there was silence — even mental silence, which was the most convincing sign to Germain that Izdran and his inhuman companions had lived their last hour.

Not taking any chances, however, he had all apparent parts of the Nrlani disrayed into nothingness, and a fifty thousand year cycle of alien conquest ended. What the Elder People had started, the Solar Government, under Germain's leadership, finished.

STILL unable to shake off a bothersome sense of guilt in being

present on the secondary plane, the rescuing crews in the Guardsman and Agarthian and Lunar fleets hastened to clean up the remaining remnants of resistance there and were at last relieved to discover those individuals who represented the old order of civilization in Atmospherea.

This titanic world, so broad that it seemed to have no horizons, was replete with low hills, rivers, forests and ancient cities of a charm and grandeur that tempted them to linger forever even as they hurried to finish their business and get out. There were many items to investigate and questions to be answered, but they dared not go into the subject even in the face of their insatiable curiosity.

In a palace that was older than they cared to calculate, Germain and his chiefs held a brief conference with several hundred leaders composing the nucleus of true government on the second plane. These latter, though appearing to be under a century old, were deceptive as far as their true age was concerned. Age was judged by the degree of wisdom to which each had attained. Gratitude was evident, but hurried anxiety was more characteristic of the general attitude on both sides.

"We, too, feel that although your presence here may be justified in the light of the unusual circumstances you should not prolong your stay," said one spokesman. He was a venerable, saintly looking patriarch with a beautiful, gray mane and eyes that appeared capable of seeing higher horizons than Tropospherean eyes could hope to see. "Although you have achieved attenuation you bring with you corporeal elements which are contagious and which could defeat the whole purpose of our own existence here. We are inexpressibly grateful to you for this liberation from our most satanic oppressors, but we urge you to go. Furthermore, there should be no future traffic between us. There are reasons which it would require many years of orientation to make you understand. Suffice it to say, what you have accomplished will work great new benefits in your own plane of existence. There shall be contact of the proper kind, and the parasitical spirits of the lower planes shall again be brought under control so that your own vision of the Infinite Goal will not be impaired—and there shall return to Earth a spiritual age advanced by new knowledge, in which Man shall combine his talents to the benefit of the *Total Power* which he, himself, represents. Now go!"

ALTHOUGH victorious Earth received its successful armadas with loud acclaim, the recipients came quietly and were reluctant to recount their experiences except in the form of a formal statement. The *Agarthian Report,* two hundred and thirty-five thousand words in length, concerning the physical existence of the Second Plane, formed the

cornerstone of a new age.

But before the tumult and the shouting had subsided Germain took a solo trip. He remembered that Central Control was filled with memory banks. Perhaps, he thought, somewhere in those banks he might find a clew to the whereabouts of his wife.

The shattered remnants of Deimos swung in a long, eccentric orbit about the sun. As he approached it he recognized the shining crystal pyramid which contained the real object of his search. Severely shaken by his nervous anticipation and sleepless days and nights, he donned a space suit and entered the place once more, again walking through the barrier flame without mishap. When he opened the airlock, however, he paused and went no farther. It was as though a great voice spoke to him and said: *This is not for you —go back!*

Central Control was a mass of fused wreckage, as though it had been struck by a U.P. bomb. The cause might have been any one of a dozen things—delayed reaction explosives, deliberate demolition on the part of the Martian slaves resulting from post-suggestion which he had failed to erase from their minds, etc. But it was the positive awareness of another *Cause* behind this complete destruction which made him turn about and leave the place in haste.

Just as he was about to enter his ship, he detected a faint aura about the satellite, or near it, as though someone had thrown up an energy screen out in space. For a moment he thought he detected the faint outlines of a titanic ship against the stars, transparent, vague, fading away into nothingness. A thought entered his mind which he never expressed to anyone: *They* have come, at last. This is their message to Man that such powers as were latent in Central Control are not for us, until, perhaps, we join them—*in Etherea* . . . Later he reported to Agarthi that he, himself, had destroyed Central Control.

The flying discs were henceforth free agents, innocuous, even friendly. Future space voyagers were to regard them as the sailor regards the dolphin—a friend to navigation —because they always guided ships through the meteor swarms or through the asteroid belt or led the rescuer to the scene of disaster, sometimes even deflecting meteors from their courses to save an otherwise ill-fated vessel with a faulty meteor screen.

* * *

GANYMEDE, some three thousand miles in diameter, presented an uninviting surface to Germain's bloodshot, sleepless eyes when, months later, he arrived to investigate a hunch. The Nrlani had gotten *ca'ta* from Ganymede, ac-

cording to the memory banks of Central Control. Perhaps, if he searched carefully, using his ESP to the fullest extent—

There, in one of the deep natural caverns of the Jovian satellite, he found Lillian. The frail, translucent, humanoid unipeds who inhabited the caverns offered little resistance to his approach, but there were several telepathic robots to be eliminated. Beyond the airlock he found a large Nrlanian laboratory factory, deserted but illuminating. Here the native uniped slaves had not only processed *ca'ta* for Martian consumption, but their work in connection with *grabdal* made the secret of this latter substance apparent. These were incidental observations made in passing. What Germain was chiefly concerned with was his wife—and his infant son . . .

Lillian came running to him and swooned with relief when he took her in his arms. Later, when he revived her, he had a difficult time supporting her mind, mentally, to the point where she could find her own balance.

"In spite of my faith in your powers," she said, "I had actually given up hope of ever seeing you again. Darling, tell me it's over with at last!"

Germain remembered Izdran's dying words: "You will never find her. Of if you do, you will regret it!" Why—he asked himself. *What* would he regret? Mentally, he probed her mind again and found it normal. With ESP he examined her internally. Again—normal.

Then, tensing, he suddenly looked at the child. A normal, healthy looking infant, considering the synthetic atmosphere and synthetic diet his mother lived on. Brown eyes—

*"Those eyes!"* he exclaimed.

Lillian sensed his alarm. "I think I know," she said. "He is a true mutant, darling! God has given us a little man to follow in the steps of his father!"

The sparkling intelligence in the little eyes was apparent—a surface detail. But Germain refrained from mentioning what his ESP revealed. In the tiny chest—two hearts. And in that tiny, multiple mind— a seed of — of —

He saw Izdran's parting shot and tried to dodge it in his mind, but he knew that the future would not permit the possibility of avoiding it. His seventh sense gave him a picture of the years to come, but what that picture demanded of him in this tender moment not even *he* could accomplish.

For how could he kill his own son? —this ertswhile innocent spirit in whom an alien fiend and an alien science, by means of rays affecting the genes and chromosomes, had implanted the dragon seeds of malevolence so ingrained and backed by a mutant ability that it would one day rise to challenge Solar Civilization!

"Stephen!" cried Lillian. "I see the trouble in your eyes! What is it?"

Instead of frowning, however, Germain suddenly smiled grimly and met the stare of his little son. Mentally he told him: *Never fear, little one. I accept the challenge of Izdran. You and I will have to come to terms—someday . . .*

* * *

WHILE Sergeyev Pavlovich languished, a prisoner patient, in Agarthi's psychiatric laboratories, a great celebration and banquet ensued above his head, in the palace where formerly the King of the World had ruled.

The personal occasion for the celebration was Sam Turner's marriage to Trinha Llih. The pair had made headlines throughout the world, as this was the first of its kind in history — an interplanetary mating. Trinha was popularly referred to as truly "out of this world." With her pale, red skin, dark eyes and modernly coiffured black hair, wearing a flowing bridal gown sprinkled with diamonds, which had been presented to her by the Terrestrial Government, as well as a priceless necklace from the secret treasure of Agarthi and brought to her from the Moon, she looked the part.

Germain, who had read her mind, had tipped Lillian off on a little secret, as well as Janice and Ingaborg. Consequently, Turner was mystified and Trinha was thrilled to read a cryptic message on the top of the wedding cake: *Long live Mrahl Sahn and Korla Na!* For Trinha, the old Martian fairytale had come true, after all!

The official occasion for the celebration was the establishment of the new Solar Government under Stephen Germain. Terrestrial Government remained sovereign, but they accepted the Agarthian Charter and the Emergency Clause. There, present in the name of Terrestrial Government to give them this assurance, was none other than former Soviet T. G. Councilman Gormski. Before television cameras he rather sheepishly made his speech, concluding with an apology.

"Just as the young man, achieving maturity, wonders where his father learned so much in ten short years, we of the everyday world outside the walls of Agarthi have come to wonder where you learned so much in less than *one* year! But I believe the layman may be forgiven his inability to absorb a complete socio-historical mutation without at least a small degree of hesitation and doubt. Even now we find the Agarthian Report to be incredible, yet our eyes hold desperately to the indisputable facts and we seek a balance with you as we all enter together into Man's bright new era . . . "

In the midst of applause, he sat down beside Doctor Borg, who en-

gaged him in conversation in their native tongue. The Russian scientist was explaining to him how Agarthi had managed to recondition the Nrlanian robots and make them useful. Even as he spoke, one of the three-eyed automatons politely offered the two men and Doctor Grange a tray of Agarthian grown fruit.

Michael Kent, seated between Lillian and Yvonne, his sister, suddenly rose to propose a toast. "To the Treasury of Solar Government!" he said, lifting his glass. The toast was not strange to those who understood the curious financial problems of Agarthi, now that it had contacted the outside world and was launching into a system wide administration. "As Solar Government's newly appointed Minister of Finance I am happy to announce the establishment of a promising agreement we have made with both Mars and Terrestrial Government, whereby a substantial foundation for commercial relationships can be built up. Solar Government will retain sole rights to Martian *grabdal,* which, as you know, is the richest known source of Uranium. Although Universal Power eliminates the necessity for atomic energy in the larger projects of this world, the latter is still of vital importance to the myriad of smaller applications of power both here and on Mars and perhaps on other planets. The revenue from this one item should enable Solar Government to advance projects of exploitation on other planets and thus put our friend and Star Warden, Stephen Germain, on a sound financial footing. This and a five percent slice of Terrestrial Government taxes will make us solvent and launch us strongly into a true interplanetary economy. Long live the Treasury—and Germain!"

EVERYONE drank to this, including several giant Lunar Interstellars who had been invited to represent their own government at this historic celebration.

"Just a moment," said Doctor Borg, snarling affably and getting to his feet. "I have long been wanting to ask Germain a question. I think this is a time for confessions. Are you ready, Germain?"

Germain merely shrugged, while Lillian smiled expectantly, looking at Borg.

"How in Heaven's name did you pass through that barrier flame and get into Central Control? It killed Eidelmann instantly."

All faces turned toward Germain. He raised his eyebrows and then grinned, sheepishly. "Oh, that!"

"Yes, *that*!" put in Rocky. "How did you do it?" Janice pinched him and he yelped.

"Well," said Germain, "I think you will find the answer quite interesting. My passing through that ancient Martian trap was the result of archaeological discovery and simple deduction. First of all, you will recall that Mars reveals evidence of an ancient civilization of

moon worshippers and pyramid builders. Remember that those moon worshippers had *two* moons to worship. Now on Earth we have had pyramid builders and moon worshippers also, and I place particular emphasis on the Western Hemisphere pyramid builders, such as the Aztecs, the Mayans and the pre-Incans. The pre-Incans who built the great temple of Pachacamac in Peru were definitely moon worshippers. Now step from this point to the prevalent totem of the Twin Star. The Incans, themselves, represented this totem with two feathers in their royal head dress, whereas the Apaches represent the Twin Stars with two horns, accompanied by a series of symbols that have been taken to represent mountains. I think those serrations under the horn head dress of the Apache medicine man really signify pyramids—the pyramids of Mars."

Exclamations went around the banquet table, but Germain raised his hand for silence, while Trinha Llih, who had learned sufficient English to understand him, beamed at him comprehendingly.

"The ancient priests of Mars observed that the Martian djurnur pod overcame gravitation. They were able to develop that principle and traverse space, themselves, as was evidenced by the temple we saw on Deimos. That they also came to Earth I now have no remaining doubts. Many of the Western Hemisphere Indian races owe their origin to these facts. What cinched the argument in my mind was the entrance to the pyramid on Deimos. The heiroglyphics there were almost exact replicas of those I had examined among the ancient pre-Incan ruins of Tiahuanaco in Southern Peru, years ago. In that moment I realized that the totem of the Twin Star represented the *two moons* of Mars. I realized that as an almost full-blooded Indian I was probably Martian, as well. So I took the chance."

"Wait a minute!" protested Rocky. "If you were at least Apache I might swallow that, but you said you were Sioux!"

Again, Germain's smile was sheepish. "Well, great grandma always *claimed* she was Sioux, but I heard it differently from a grandpa of mine who was a sort of black sheep of the family. She ran away from her Apache tribe with a Sioux brave, who was great grandpa. Later she always tried to claim she was Sioux, herself."

Lillian looked at him aghast. "Stephen! And you mean to say that you risked your life and all of us on the hunch that an old family anecdote had been twisted from the truth?"

"What would you have done?" he asked, and the question was put to the crowd, in general. The ensuing silence was an eloquent answer.

"Imagine!" said Rocky, irrepressibly. "When the old European

explorers started exploiting the great civilizations of the Western Hemisphere they were engaged in a *real* war of the worlds and didn't know it!"

IN THE meantime, an infant mutant found his father's great mind, groping instinctively for mental contact. Germain was quietly aware of the precocious power there, formless, weak of will, as yet, but a power that would grow. Its primal instinct was hate. He knew it would grow to hate the human race, but his own love for his flesh and blood was the only weapon he would ever be able to use.

For Germain, alone, this bright new dawn of Civilization was darkened by a growing cloud on the horizon of his future—from which the dead hand of Izdran was to reach out and strike at him with thunders and lightnings that were yet to be felt in all the worlds he would govern . . .

THE END

## SPECIAL FEATURES

EDITORIAL (*Continued on page* 5)

from Chicago to Ireland. So *why* sock the Irishman an extra fin? OTHER WORLDS will sell subscriptions to OTHER WORLDS to anybody in the world for the same price Americans pay! And that goes for that $5.00 for 25 issues proposition too. To the science fiction fan, there is no such thing as a national boundary. We're *real* gadabouts! We've been to the stars! To other galaxies! We've met the lizard-men of Pluto. And some of them were pretty good joes!

We've just thought of another ambition! We'd like to sell enough OTHER WORLDS to make so much money we can afford to drop the price to the lowest price of any stf magazine on the stands!

Well, we can dream, can't we? And if it came true, we'd *do* it. That's what all this means. Ray Palmer would like to spend the rest of his life in giving, rather than taking. You can't imagine how much fun it is! After all, how much can a man eat? *Rap.*

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# Science Fiction Book Reviews

L. Sprague de Camp is known for his fun mixed with fantasy, while P. Schulyer Miller is no slouch at the game. Together they've written *GENUS HOMO* (Fantasy Press, Reading, Penna., $3), which makes for a busload of fun.

That's the gimmick—a busload of people are buried in a tunnel during a landslide and one of their number, an inventor enroute to a scientific convention, accidentally releases a secret gas he's carrying in a container. The gas makes for a very pleasant, if somewhat long, sleep, for when the party is awakened the world they knew has vanished, the race of Man is but a memory. Stumbling from their hole into the countryside which used to be Ohio, they are hard put to defend themselves from beavers, parrots and chipmunks. Chipmunks the size of mountain lions.

Rescue comes at a dangerous moment and they are safely carried away and housed in a zoo. Our friend the apes rule the world, and are not doing too bad a job of it either.

Lewis Padgett seldom fails to please, whether he writes under that name, or as Lawrence O'Donnell, or just plain Henry Kuttner. As Padgett, his first collection, A *GNOME THERE WAS* (Simon & Schuster, New York, $2.50), is at group of eleven of his better tales ranging from fantastic humor to memorable fantasy. Probably the best-known title included here is his "Mimsy Were the Borogoves". "Compliments of the Author," and "The Twonky" will likewise be remembered by his fans. If a suggestion is in order, let his next collection include "Vintage Season."

Eleven years ago I read a space opera which left such an impression on my mind that I never forgot it, despite the deluge of other such operas in the following years. Some time ago that story was republished in book form and I read it again, slightly fearful of what time might have done to it. *COSMIC ENGINEERS* by Clifford D. Simak (Gnome Press, New York, $2.50) didn't disappoint me, although I found that time had caused me to imagine elements in the story that were never there.

A woman is revived from a sealed prison floating in space, revived after a thousand years to reveal that her mind had continued active all that while, had gone on working for nearly ten centuries. She had heard "voices" talking across space, voices believed to originate somewhere out near the exploding rim of the universe. She is included among the crew of the first interstellar ship launched to discover the owners of those voices, and plays a major part in the resulting complications.

*Bob Tucker*

# LETTERS

TODD MARTIN

Having been a science fiction addict since 1945 I'd like to voice a few opinions gathered in these last six years. I believe, along with many personal friends and fans, that Richard Shaver is probably the greatest thing to hit science fiction since H. G. Wells. The Shaver Mystery is still discussed with much gusto at our dinner table, why don't you bring it back?

Your policy concerning serials, to be perfectly frank, stinks. One of the reasons *Amazing* was so popular with me (when you were Ed.) was the lack of these *monsters*. I hate to see you use them.

As yet you haven't come up with a story of the calibre of my three favorites. Any Shaver cave story; "Forever Is Too Long"; or "So Shall Ye Reap". I'm aware that these were exceptionally fine stories by excellent authors. I hope you can duplicate the quality very soon.

In conclusion, I believe you've the finest mag on the market now, and I'll remain an ardent fan.

No. 743, T. C. U.,
Fort Worth, Texas.

*We can't bring the Mystery back, but we are bringing Shaver back. We will shortly begin a three-part serial by him called "The Sun-Smiths" which will bring a great many of the characters you like so well back to you in what we promise will be a thrilling, sensational experience, for Mystery fans as well as just plain science fiction fans. As for our serial policy, it isn't. We only got tired of turning down all the good stories because they were long, and running tripe because it fit into the magazine. As for how we began the serials, we agree, the method stunk. We've ironed that out now, and you'll find the serials don't dominate the scene to the extent they did in January.—Rap.*

ALEX SAUNDERS

In answer to your comments on my letter in the Jan. '52 issue of OW, your predictions came true on two counts. 1) I held. 2) I did find it worthwhile. Seriously, Rap, the Jan. issue was a honey—one of the best! Chockfull of pulse-pounding material from the excellent McCauley cover to the back photo of Kenneth Arnold. I enjoyed your hard-hitting editorial, and would like to see more along the same lines. "These Are My Children" started out flawlessly. Rog Phillips has a style so smooth, so interesting, that one is hardly aware of reading. Yes, the first installment was great, but now a six-week wait for the final one is forced upon us readers. Say! This is becoming a habit of mine, complaining about the too-long de-

lays between issues. Arnold's contribution, "The Real Flying Saucers" was worth reading. "Happy Solution" by T. P. Caravan was good, as was the conclusion of Richard Ashby's serial "Act Of God". That was a striking illo by Fuqua for the latter. One worth saving. Special Features, "The Man From Tomorrow" and "Fun With Science" was my meat. I can't get enough of that sort of thing, so keep dishing it out, won't you? And the letters. That dept. kept on the lengthy side would make this reader a mighty happy one. Thanks again, Rap., for an exceptional issue of OW, an issue that was clear out of this world.

34 Hillsdale Ave., W.,
Toronto 12, Ontario.

*By the way, Alex, OW is now on sale on the newsstands everywhere in Canada. Your address reminded us of that little fact.—Rap.*

DWIGHT PORTER

*Other Worlds* has just gone up at least 500% in my estimation after reading "Happy Solution," by Mr. Caravan. Rarely have I found a story in any SF magazine that is as polished, witty, and satirical as this one. Being a student at S.M.U., I become tired of Victorian literature and such, and turn to SF for relaxation and pleasure. When I read SF, I look for no profound messages, warnings, or involved technical data on the best method for building rocket ships to the Moon. I care not one whit for sexy covers, dianetics, or flying saucers. In brief, I look for entertainment.

The first SF story I read was by Rog Phillips in *Amazing Stories*. (Something about the population of the earth almost being wiped out, and the people eating giant cockroaches three times a day.) Since that first fateful story, I have tried to find the best in SF. I became tired of *Astounding when they went "hog-wild"* on dianetics, which, according to my psychology professor, has no scientific basis for fact, but is comparable to the other pseudo-sciences, such as astrology, palm reading, etc. I considered *Galaxy* the top in the field until I read Mr. Caravan's story. Continue in your policy (or no-policy) of giving the readers really enjoyable stories, not flying saucer or dianetics fads, and I feel certain that you will increase circulation, while at the same time giving your readers more for their money than any other SF magazine. Too many magazines have gone off the track by trying to appeal to a small fad group, who,most probably, write the majority of letters to the editor. The majority of readers are, like myself, looking for enjoyable stories. Keep up the good work!

2728 Milton,
Dallas 5, Texas.

*Then you'll be delighted to know we've bought a sequel to "Happy Solution" and you'll get it soon.—Rap.*

DICK ANDERSON

This letter will never see print. In it I grind no axe, condemn no editor nor mag to literary death, nor banish Shaver and Life beyond Pluto.

Every month I buy and read OW, *Astounding* and *Galaxy*. OW is tops; why? Simply because it completely satisfies my individual taste. *Galaxy* has, for me, an unpleasant psychological slant and *Astounding* one that is too heavily technical. I am not referring to any particular story but rather the general pattern of these mags.

OW combines the best features of these aspects into good readable stories. More power to you in your policy not to limit the space of a good story. Run a novel from here to infinity if it is as good as Act of God or These Are My Children.

Last I would like to express my appreciation to you, Ray, for being impossible. You are almost that, you know, for in this day and age an editor who will print opinions which lock horns with his own and sometimes even insult him personally is indeed a rare and wonderful thing. Again, thanks for OW, a grand book.

4552 51 Ave. N.E.,
Seattle, Wash.

*Wish we were as rare and wonderful as you think we are! Unfortunately, however, we've looked in a mirror . . . —Rap.*

BEN DUKE

A group of us science fiction readers here in Los Angeles have long been trying to understand that book OAHSPE which we bought as a result of R. P. Graham's comments on it in the AMAZING STORIES when you were editor of that publication 5 yrs ago.

Now, after studying OAHSPE all this time, we would like to hear from you and others who have also read OAHSPE, especially science fiction readers, like ourselves. We would like to know what others think of it. For OAHSPE is a big fact in our midst, and many of us feel that if something good is not done about it, then something bad may result to many in spite of it.

1. Is OAHSPE 50 years ahead of our times or 50 years behind our times?

2. Is OAHSPE in truth the account of the visits of an interstellar organization to this earth over a period of 72,000 years, with headquarters in the Orion region, and with their already appointed Chief or Custodian of this planet?

3. Is OAHSPE intended to be a masterpiece of propaganda put out by an advanced interstellar organization, with sinister motives instead of the benevolent ones professed in OAHSPE? What purpose? What do they want of us, anyhow? Do we owe them anything? Do they owe us anything?

4. Did they "help" make you editor of various science fiction publications with their own but undisclosed purposes in mind? WHY?

5. If terrestrial students of OAHSPE were affiliated after the manner set forth in OAHSPE, and said to be of the same type of organization which the authors of OAHSPE have, would "Elder Brothers" condescend to recognize, encourage, enlighten, or otherwise communicate with us in some manner?

6. One gets the impression from OAHSPE that our Elder Brothers know just about everything that goes on here on this bloody planet. Well, if we were affiliated among ourselves in the best brotherly manner, might not that information get to them somehow? And, seeing that we feel friendly toward them, might not one of them find time to drop you or one of us a message, possibly saying, "Dear Ray, Having a fine time here. Wish you were here," or, "Just passed thru here. How are you getting along with your mags, kid? Fine, I hope." Etc.

7. Since you can be relied upon to give all things a pretty fair hearing, and since possibly they "helped" place you a little in the first place, why can't they be a little more communicative, a little more confidential, possibly via your "Man of Tomorrow"?

8. Could some of the Flying Saucers really be some of their ships, going about their routine business, somewhat as you described in your "I FLEW IN A FLYING SAUCER"?

9. Is there anything, is there any experiment, individual or collective, which we OAHSPE and OTHER WORLDS readers could perform, which would in some way get to the attention of this supposed OTHER WORLD organization, and cause them to do something in our pro or contra?

10. What do you say, readers of OTHER WORLDS and of OAHSPE? What of OAHSPE? Is it science or fiction, and in what proportions? How much longer must we passively wait for OAHSPE or its authors to do something for or to us? And if we are ready to do something ourselves, then what?

Let's hear from any and all on anything pertinent to OAHSPE.

1866 W. 11th St.,
Los Angeles 6, Calif.

*My personal opinions on OAHSPE? More people should read it —if for nothing else than to get a little mental exercise! As for our readers, maybe some of them will write you . . . Those questions of yours are honies! I certainly can't answer them! Except one . . . I can tell you no angels helped me get that job by Ziff-Davis, unless Ralph Milne Farley is an angel! Regarding our "man from tomorrow," we may have a little surprise for you in a few issues. Don't swallow that stuff too much, because, frankly, we don't believe it ourselves! All we want to know is whether or not those preddictions come out* 100 *per cent! If they do (or don't) then we'll unload a little secret . . . As for my second half of the Flying Saucer story, some*

*of the ideas were suggested by OAHSPE, and I consider the idea a fascinating one, but I sure don't know anything like that exists.—Rap.*

SHIRLEY WATSON

The edition containing "I Flew in a Flying Saucer" arrived last night, and I couldn't put it down till I had finished it. Certainly, Captain A. V. G. has a brilliant imagination about those people who live forever. That "Saucer" was a magnificent thing with all those shiny compartments.

I disagree with their having come from the moon, because there is no air up there, but the real saucers may have come from a planet of the nearest sun to our sun, which is 25 trillion miles away. After reading Kenneth Arnold's two articles upon those flying objects, I am quite convinced of their existence.

I will be watching OTHER WORLDS for more articles upon this subject, as it is a great source of entertainment to me. It helps me get my mind off the stress and strain of the office.

I have acquired quite a "Flying Saucer Library" by now, with the two issues of the novel by Captain A. V. G., the issue of Kenneth Arnold's proof along with his booklet, and a copy of FATE Magazine which has a long article upon flying saucers, and a small booklet put out by TRUE magazine. If you know of any more, please let me know, as collecting these has become a hobby with me.

Rt. 2,
Vienna, Va.

*Do I know of any more! Hey, Ken and I are putting out a book right now which will knock your ears off! Why not send me* $4.00 *and make sure you get your copy? We can't print many, not being wealthy, but if you're that interested, we're doing this for you!—Rap.*

ANONYMOUS

Just read issue number 16 of "Other Worlds." Mr. Shaver was a misguided though perhaps a somewhat enlightened fool. Now, you seem to be following his example. Reference is made specifically to your special feature, "The Man From Tomorrow"; and, to continuous publication of articles of flying saucers. Word of the saucers must be kept before your reader's eyes, I am lead to believe.

Certain aspects of your career the past few years lead me to wonder many things. First, your endeavors form an interesting pattern. In fact, this observer is inclined to believe the pattern is not one of chance, but rather is one of design. Following that assumption, natural questions are perceived. What is your objective? What are your motives? What is the source of direction, if any?

You are an unknown factor to this observer. Do you monitor "broadcasts" not intended for you; or, are you a "commissioned acti-

vator"? If you are the latter, your method of instruction deviates considerably from established procedure. I disregard not possibilities of innovation. I should dislike keeping your activities under surveillance needlessly through an oversight by a "reporter".

If you are one of us, please end your special feature "Man From Tomorrow" in issue number 18 with your initials, "Rap." If you are not, I am just another crank.

Rapid City,
S. Dak.

*Here we go again! Ye gods! First, just what is an "enlightened fool"? Sure, our pattern is one of design! We intend to put out the most interesting magazine in America. Also, we intend to have fun doing it. Further, we think our type of "pattern" is darn good mental exercise, and we think OW (and Amazing before it) achieved something besides complete vacuity in its readers minds. In short, we think we've got a little meat, a little sense, a little philosophy, a sort of "balance" that really adult minds welcome. My objective? Well, the greatest one in the world! You guess what it is! My motive? Making the world a better and happier and more sensible place to live in—in addition to not taking it so darn seriously we can't grin once in awhile! Source of direction? God gave me certain talents. I wouldn't let Him down by not using them! Do I "monitor" broadcasts not intended for me? Do you mean do I hear voices? Well, I've got an imagination, and I'm not stupid. I can hear a tree talking, or a flower, or the wind, or a piece of mud. I can converse with birds, fish, skunks, and men. A beautiful woman sings poetry to me without opening her lips. The sunset stirs me to almost a sense of exaltation. I find life a wonderful thing, and I think I am in tune with a lot of it. But "broadcasts" . . . What broadcasts are you speaking of? Secret societies, mystic hogwash? The MAN FROM TOMORROW? Am I a "commissioned activator". No, I'm a decontaminated reactor! I'm a radio-active blob of air in a paper bag! Sure, keep me under surveillance! You can subscribe for 24 issues for $6.00 "or, if you are a friend, you can help me put out OW monthly by signing up for 25 issues for $5.00 for a lifetime option!" And lastly, not knowing who you are (you signed your name with some sort of gibberish) I don't know if I'm one of you or not—except I'm a human being, and I assume you are too!—Rap.*

ROM ROBERTS

Just as most ardent readers of science fiction, I read almost all the various and sundry magazines that find their ways to the magazine stands. However, I must and do protest the bickering between readers and magazines, magazines and magazines, as to who prints the *best* "mag" and the best stories. I remain

neutral because I am of the opinion that each mag is like a human; it has its good and bad points, and can be judged on its own personal achievements, but at least at some time in its history offered good authors and author material.

O.W. is up there at the top with the best (F&SF, *Astounding, Galaxy,* and *Amazing* to mention a few.) You deserve a pat on the back in maintaining the high standards of story acceptance for one of the nation's cleanest and most entertaining magazines. (O. W. that is).

Now I must step down from the podium after delivering my meticulously concepted discourse and offer another beef. After having read the Jan. issue, I began typing this letter mainly in disgust of one of the stories in the mag which I believe violated your usual high standards: *Happy Solution* by T. P. Caravan. This (PHEW!) is the worst possible thing that could happen to O.W. The wording and sentence structure were atrocious and the plot was childishly simple. I would like to know the author's age. Please, no more like it.

Oops! There I go running off at the mouth again. After all I write stories for my own amusement which that could be critized much further. No one is perfect: notice my sloppy typing.

I'll close here saying: keep up the good work and in the future I'll buy more O.W.'s.

846 N.E. 2nd Ave.,
Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.

*Happy Solution was DELIBERATELY written that way! It was a bit of satire, a bit of fun, such as only OW indulges in. And frankly, it received more fan mail than our novel! Sure, it's fairy tale, written exactly as fairy tales were written. I read one to my kids every evening at bedtime, and they enjoy them. And our readers like to go back to memories like that once in awhile, and this story was a "modernized" version. But if you didn't like it, you didn't! And we're going to scrabble around and get something YOU like, if we have to buy your own story! Good enough?—Rap.*

H. B. NORDSTROM

As there seems to be some thought relating to weather conditions, effected by the atom bombs, let us analyse this situation.

First, we have become acclimated to the temperatures at various parts of the earth. This is created by Cosmic rays, which when striking the air strata surrounding this globe and penetrating same, creates friction, which warms the air. Cosmic rays, like radio waves, travel a lot better in cold weather than in warm weather, and as we get outside of the air strata, we get into an intense cold. It is this cold that permits the travel of these Cosmic rays, a portion of which strikes the air surrounding this globe.

In the explosion of an atom bomb, this average temperature at the earth

surface, is blown up approximately eight miles or some 40,000 feet into the upward stratas. This in turn, creates a suction, that brings down the intense cold from above, to replace the warm air that was sent upward. In 1950, we find, after the atom bombs were exploded, cattle dying in Texas, oranges frozen in Southern California, and an increase in rainfall in many areas. In Chico, there were but few days, between November and February that it did not rain. We also find we had a lot of rain flooding Kansas City area, something that did not occur prior to the explosion of the atom bombs. Weather in Chico was colder than the average, oranges freezing and breaking wide open.

Perhaps this bombing is necessary, perhaps not! So far, we are inclined to seek its use in destroying our fellow man, as its use in Japan. As the nuclear theory is understood, all matter is fissionable, it being but a matter of enough power to set it off, and, finally we may find a power sufficient to explode the entire world and so we may become another nova. Of course we need not worry about this, as when that happens we will all go with the rest of humanity, so, if this be progress (civilized) what are we to expect in the final outcome?

Today, the world seems they have missed the boat, in that every country seems suspicious of each other, and instead of love for one another, we have hate. Even those who we elect into office to represent us seem to have overlooked something in their frantic efforts to destroy humanity. Our Korean casualties are now over 100,000 and it has been stated this does not include those amputees that were effected by the freezing weather; they were not considered as war casualties; one wonders why? If the atom bomb lowered the temperature in many places in this country, there would seem to be no question but that it also effected the Korean weather as well as elsewhere. We are all talking for peace, why not go a little further in this direction, and stop all the atom bomb explosions.

Chico, Calif.

*We don't know where you get your information about our atmosphere and cosmic rays, but we agree, we wish the atom wasn't used for bombs!—Rap.*

PAT HEILMA

I want to congratulate you on your editorial policy. I believe it is the most friendly one in the field. And, incidentally, the best. I think stf should educate its readers as it entertains them. But the educating can be done very well by the writers. Just reading stf cannot but help to broaden a person's horizons. It should also make him a more tolerant being.

Your personal department is a very generous gesture. I wonder if

your readers realize just how much money that space could bring you if used for advertisements.

To be entirely truthful, *aSF* and *Galaxy* are my favorite stf magazines but I wish the latter had an editorial policy one fraction as friendly as yours. I am getting just a bit tired of Galaxy's horn blowing.

I love your reply to Mr. Lundburg's letter! Never have I read such a scathing wonderful reply to a letter whose rudeness would turn even the most angelic of editors (who, you?) into a devil. Mr. Lundburg could have made the same points with a little less—shall we say—force?

Why in the name of E.R.B. does he state that he shall never read another issue of O.W. when he admits that the stories are good. If I cared more about the editorial policy than the stories, I would have given up *Galaxy* long ago.

Of course, I may be mistaken. But I am under the impression that the editorial supplements the stories, not vice versa.

But, wait a minute! The day *ASF* became *aSF* was a lucky one! Period!

Back to your reply (which is a classic). Perhaps Mr. Lundburg thinks he is a "homo superior". However, I like your idea of the missing link better.

So far, I have bought every mag that comes to our stands, but now I'll have to be choosy. I'm going to take *Galaxy; aSF; F and SF; Galaxy Novels* which I, at least, buy; *O.W.* and *Madge.*

By the way, congratulations on the most beautiful cover girl in a long time.

I would like to correspond with other fans, especially ones interested in things scientific.

4558 Mary Ellen Ave.,
Van Nuys, Cal.

*Say, how come you're not tired of OUR horn-blowing. We think we outdo Galaxy in that respect. H. L. Gold isn't such a bad guy! In fact, he's plenty good!—Rap.*

ED L. PRICHARD, Jr.

I have just finished the first part of "I Flew in a Flying Saucer" in the October issue of OW. It's a good story, but there's one mistake on page 64 that is hard to overlook. The story is supposedly written by an Air Force captain. I don't see how he made the rank of captain if he doesn't know his jet planes. He says on page 64, "I'd just landed my jet F-82 . . ." An F-82 is not a jet, but a prop-driven twin Mustang. Is it a misprint, or should Captain A.V.G. go back to ground school?

The October issue was my second issue of O.W. I think it is a fine mag, and offers plenty of variety. Keep up the good work.

By the way, are there any science-fiction clubs in Jacksonville?

4815 Astral St.,
Jacksonville 5, Fla.

*No, the Captain doesn't have to*

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*go back to ground school, but Ray Palmer does. HE made that mistake. He made lots more, but an aviation friend of ours caught some of them. Seems we can't read! As for a club in Jacksonville, maybe our other readers there will contact you. —Rap.*

---

# PERSONALS

*Want pen-pals, boys or gals, about our own age, which is* 16. *Dave Foley,* 700 *Ocean Ave, Brooklyn* 26, *N.Y. and Pete De Paola,* 2109 *Regent Place, Brooklyn* 26, *NY. . . .* Thomas Giammo, 1662 Cropsey Ave, Brooklyn 14, NY, wants to know if Avon SF Reader is still published. Has for sale; F & SF, Apr '51 20c Galaxy, Apr. & May '51, 25c ea.; Avon SF Reader 1 & 2, 40c ea.; AS, Nov '51-Jan '52, 20c ea.; SSS, June & Aug '51, 20c ea.; Future, Jan '52, 15c; PS, June '51 & Jan. '52, 20c ea.; Fantastic, Win '51, 20c; Imag, Sept '51, 25c. All in good to mint condition; include 5c postage for each 2 mags. Whole lot for $3.20, no postage . . . *Will sell below cost: OW, Oct* '50; *Mag of Fantasy, issue No.*1; *AS, April* '48, *Nov.* '49 *Jan & Mar.* '50 *and Sept* '51; *AS Quarterly Win* '47; *all issues of A. Merritt Fantasy; aSF, Mar* '39; *TWS, Feb & Dec* '49; *SS, Jan & Mar* '50; *FFM, Oct* '47, *Feb* '50; *Super Science, Sept* '50 *& June* '51; *most issues of Doc Savage from* '36-'45. *Mitchell Badler,* 1711 *Davidson Ave., NY* 53, *NY. . . .* Want Flying Saucer clippings from newspapers and mags; tear-sheets and source and date if possible; also, radio references. Anyone interested in discussing the saucers please write. Also want books & mag material written by Joseph McCabe. Have thousands of stf and fantasy as well as non-fantasy books and mags to trade for above or will sell at reasonable prices. H. Brock, 1618 34 Ave, Seattle 22, Wash. . . . *Will sell for* 20c *each: OW,* 7-16; *aSF,* '50 *comp.,* '51 *comp. except for July; AS, Aug* '50 *to Jan* '51; *Galaxy,* 1-15, *and novels* 1-4; *Super Science, Sept* '50, *Nov* '50 *& Jan* '51. *Will sell entire lot plus* 20 *assorted stf mags* (*no duplicates*) *for* $10. *All are in good to exc. cond. except AS which are only fair. Will trade or sell the following, all in exc cond: Men Against the Stars,* $2; *Martian Chronicles* $1.75; *Pattern for Conquest,* $1.50; *Man Who Sold the Moon,* $2; *Strange Ports of Call,* $2.50; *Voyage of the Space Beagle,* $1.75. *Lee Jacquette,* 145 *Shoreview Rd, Manhasset, N.Y. . . .* Wanted: PBs Beyond the Moon, Hamilton; Out of the Silent Planet, Lewis; Avon Ghost Reader; Earth-

man, Bradbury; Ship of Ishtar, Merritt; Worlds Within, Phillips; PB of Stf, Wollheim; Invasion from Mars, O. Wells. Will trade or sell for $1 each these hard-cover books: She-H. Rider Haggard; Nutro 29-Norris; Moon Colony-Bell; Purple Cloud-Sheil; Alas That Great City-Ashton; Thunder Bolt Men; Best Supernatural Stories of Lovecraft. Roland Dumontet, 363 Linden Blvd, Brooklyn 3, NY. . . . *Wanted: Back to the Stone Age, Apache Devil, Tanar of Pellucidar, The Mucker, The Girl From Hollywood, The Land That Time Forgot, The Cave Girl, The Moon Maid, The Mad King, The Outlaw of Torn, The Monster Men, Jungle Girl, The Lad and the Lion, At the Earth's Core, The Deputy Sheriff of Comanche County; all by E. R. Burroughs, prefer with d-w. Peter Arno's Cartoon Revue* (1941), *For Members Only* (1935), *Whoops, Dearie!* (1927); *Walt Disney's Fantasia, Deems Taylor; Many Happy Returns, Groucho Marx. Want copies of Prince Valient comic strips, pre Dec* 12, 1941; *Tarzan comic strips* (*Sunday only*) *pre Jan* '50; *Tarzan strips from Sparkler and Tip-Top comic books and any Tarzan comic books published by United Features and any Prince Valient comic books. Want copies of Tarzan and the Tarzan Twins With Jad-Bal-Ja the Golden Lion, and books by O. A. Kline, Planet of Peril; Prince of Peril and* 1st *ed. of Maza of the Moon, Agent From Bear Creek, R. E. Howard; and artwork by J. Allen St. John. Alexander Fundukis, 629 W.* 135 *St, NY* 31, *NY*. . . . Have over 500 duplicates dating back to 1927 which I will trade for Terror Tales, Horror Stories, Uncanny Tales, Mystery Tales, Magic Carpet, Oriental Stories, pre-'30 WT; pre '39 aSF, Amazing Annual, Witches Tales, Miracle Science, Thrill Book, Unusual Stories, Flash Gordon and recent books. Howard DeVore, 16536 Evanston St, Detroit 24, Mich. . . . *Wanted: Back issues of all E. C. comics and back issues of all stf mags. Warren Dennis,* 511 *Plaisance Ave, Rockford, Ill.* . . .

I have hundreds of single copies of magazines, including AS, FA, SSS, TWS, WT, FFM, FN, aSF, MADGE, OW, and many others including a lot of the old "pulps" DOC SAVAGE, ADVENTURE, SHORT STORIES, BLUE BOOK, FIVE NOVELS and many others, both stf and pulp. Most of the newer mags are in perfect condition. I also have an old Burroughs story, The Black Pirates of Barsoom, in the June '41 AS which will throw in with the first $12.00 purchase. It has a cover

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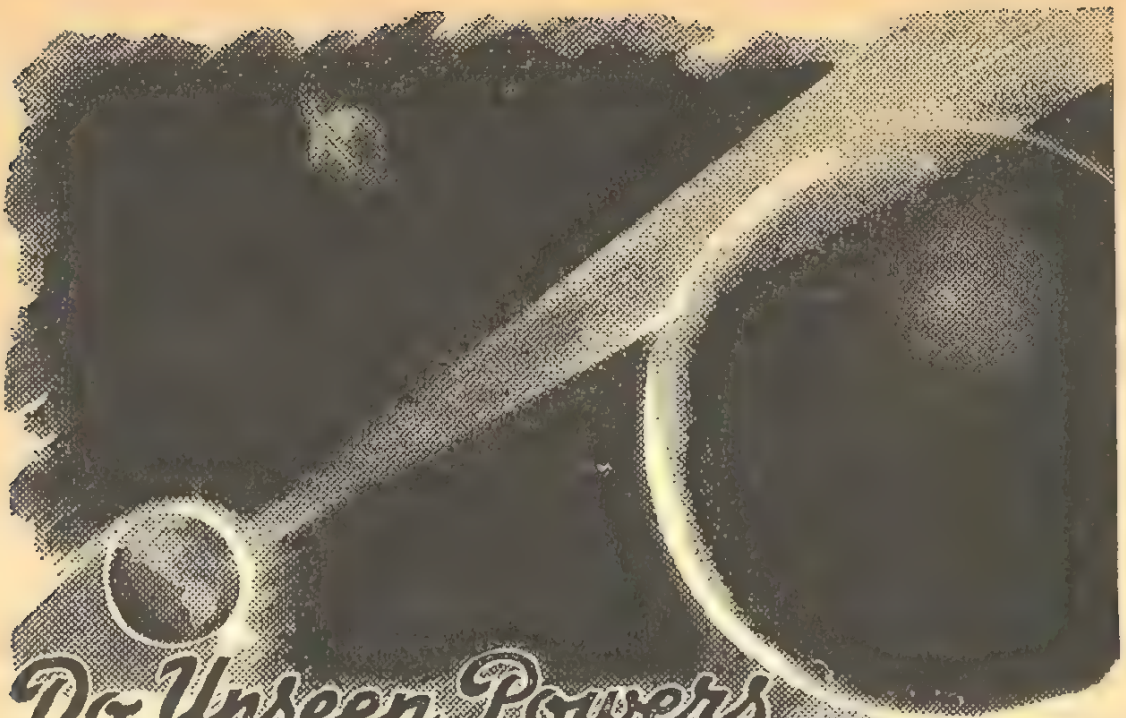
and interiors by St. John. Send your want list and what you prefer to pay, and if the price is right, I'll sell. I might also trade for some mags with Burroughs stories, if a short outline accompanies the offer. Bill Peck, 1041 W. Agarita Ave., San Antonio 1, Texas . . . *I am interested in sending art work, stories, articles to fanzines. I am interested in forming or joining a fan club in Nassau county, or NYC. Want pre* '46 *Astoundings, all issues of OW except* 7, 13, 14, 15 *for which I will trade or sell the following: Galaxy,* 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, *Planet* '51 *Nov. Sept. July, March, Jan,* '50 *Spring, Fall, Nov. TCSAB* 1, 2, 3. *Future, Nov.* '50, *Jan, Mar, July, Sept,* '51. *Amazing, SS and others. Send wants. Charles Danowski, Glen Cove Road, Greenvale, L.I., N.Y.* . . . I am publishing my own fanzine named OOPSLA, 10c and bi-monthly. First issue contains Rog Phillips, one of your leading authors, as well as Tom Covington, Lee Hoffman and Shelby Vick. Send a dime for sample copy. Gregg Calkins, 930 Briarcliff Ave., Salt Lake City 16, Utah . . . *Miami University Science Fiction Association (MUSFA) is planning a yearbook. Will other University fan groups contact me? I'd like to know what other University clubs do. Bruce Ronald,* 101 *East Collins St, Oxford, Ohio* . . . For sale: Best Short Stories of Jack London (Perma) at 45c including postage. The Great Houdini (Pocketbook Jr.) at 35c including postage. The Science-Fiction Galaxy (Perma) at 50c including postage. Numerous back issues of Coronet, and the Pocket Book Reader at 50c prepaid. Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes (Bantam) 35c postpaid. Tarzan books and Zane Grey books in perfect condition at $2.25 each, including postage. Also pre-'25 children's novels at $3.00 each including postage. Send your wants and self-addressed envelope so I can tell you if I have them. I have most pocketbooks at 30c, plus postage. Avon's Saturday Evening Post's Fantasy Stories, 34c prepaid. Will trade Best Stories of Jack London for first offer of first copies of OW, Science Fiction, Galaxy, for numbers 2 and 3 OW. Franklyn Eugene Cohen, 73-12 35th Ave., Jackson Heights 72, New York . . . *Have RR mag from* '34 *to* '51 *and all kinds stf mags to trade for stf. Send list of haves and wants to Robert R. Wheeler,* 65 *Canal St, Port Jervis, N.Y. . . Have The Outsider & Beyond the Wall of Sleep, OK, FATE & MADGE from No.* 1 *Lovecraft; mint, d/w; large runs of thru* '51; *early Science Wonder Quarterlies, AS quarterlies & Wonder Stories from* '28; *SS, TWS, PS, AS, FA, WT, Galaxy, Avon Fantasy Reader* (1 *to* 15). *Many scarce occult books & mags; large file of rocketry books & mags. Wants pre* '47 *a SF and Unknown; pre* '44 *FN* N *FFM; pre* '37 *WT; stf books & digest mags. Sell or trade. Calvin T. Beck, P. O. Box* 4155, *Jacksonville, Fla.*



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Scribe H. G. V.
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# The $50.00 Author Contest

In the March 1952 OTHER WORLDS, we published Claude Hall's prize-winning plot and awarded him $50.00 for furnishing the answer as to what was happening on the October 1951 OW cover. The next problem was to choose an author to write the story for us—and we decided to leave the matter in your hands. The prize, again, $50.00. The contest, to write a letter nominating your favorite author and giving the reasons you think he or she is the best choice for the job.

Letters began pouring into the office, and believe us, it was some job coming to a decision. With so many writers suggested, all of whom can turn out terrific stories, we had to read, re-read and then read again many of the entries before finally picking the winner. However, we think you'll agree with us that Mr. McNamara has stated his case very convincingly:

50 Plaza Street,
Brooklyn 17, N.Y.
Feb. 25, 1952.

Dear RAP,

Have just read rules for your latest contest, and am quite sure of who the author should be to supply the story for the plot so ably expounded in your March issue by Mr. Hall.

The author would be L. Sprague deCamp, master of fantasy and science fiction writing. DeCamp is especially adept in the time travel—fourth dimension—parallel worlds themes, e.g. "The Carnelian Cube," "Wheels of If" and others.

Mr. deCamp can certainly write an entertaining novel about the adventures of the four as they stumble from the time-pool into weird world after world, and at the same time mixing in the rare humor and sagacity which have made him one of s-f's leading writers.

Very truly yours,
Robert Dennis McNamara.

By the time this issue reaches you, our contest winner will have received his $50.00 and L. Sprague DeCamp will have all of the details of the contest, the plot, and how he happened to be chosen to write the story. And the rest of us will be waiting impatiently for the finished manuscript to arrive.

THE EDITORS

# A Physicist Regards The Eternal Verities

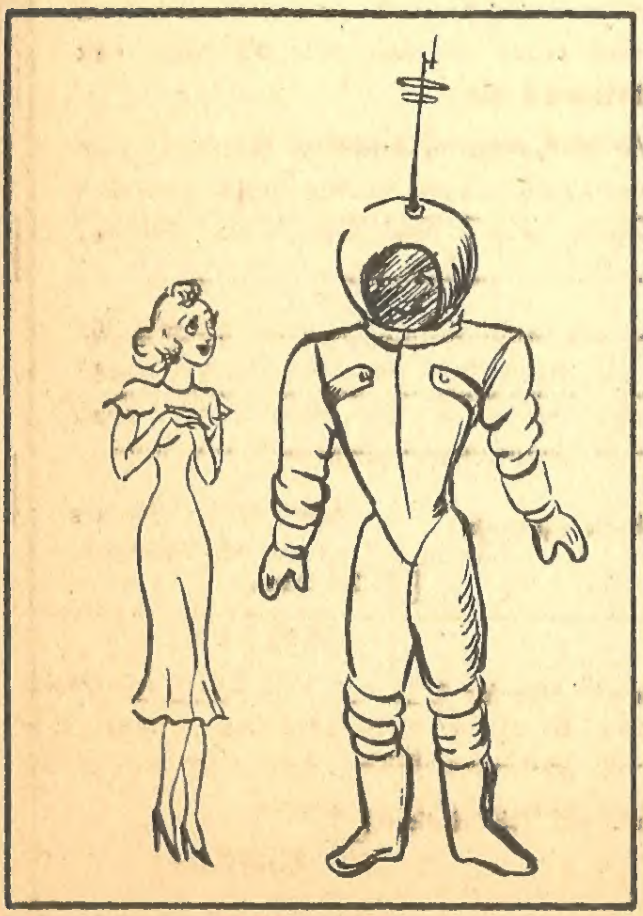
In this rude world of change and
flow,
Where stable things are few,
It's comforting at least to know,
That E is still $h\nu$

Though empires fall and lackeys
rule,
And revolutions flare,
This truth is known to every fool.
$A = \pi r^2$.

E'en though no scientist remain
To chart the wand'ring star,
The thunderclap will still proclaim
$Heat = I^2r$.

And when at length the sun grows
cold,
O'er frozen earth and sea,
The atmosphere will still uphold,
PV is NRT.

*Richard Crawford*



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# *The People Who Make* OTHER WORLDS

## No. 4 Richard S. Shaver

EARLY in the Summer of 1944, an unknown writer put his first words on paper—only he didn't know he was a writer. All he intended to do was to write a letter to the editor of *Amazing Stories*, the same man who now edits OTHER WORLDS. If destiny ever rode on a three cent stamp, it rode with the one that carried that letter!

In 1945 Mr. Shaver's first story appeared, entitled "I Remember Lemuria!" It created a sensation, added 50,000 readers to the circulation of *Amazing Stories* overnight. In that, Mr. Shaver stands alone as this decade's most potent salesman of pulp magazines. That extra sale was maintained for five years while Mr. Shaver's incredible stories appeared in a quantity almost unbelievable for a man who had never written a word in his life, and who knew more about electric welding than he did about typing.

Before the strange type of story manufactured by Mr. Shaver had run its course, it had swept into national prominence. Even LIFE magazine gave it an unprecedented amount of space. Back copies of his stories sold for a dollar apiece in second-hand magazine stores. Readers wrote more than 50,000 letters to the editor.

Perhaps it was all because Mr. Shaver believed in what he wrote; or perhaps it was because he wrote so convincingly that many others believed what he wrote in spite of

the lack of evidence to support his fantastic claims. No one will ever know why he zoomed into such meteoric (but permanent) prominence. Be that as it may, he wrote himself out at last, and paused for breath.

Then, in 1951 he began a comeback, this time striving to turn out the sort of story that would stand on its merits as a story, rather than on any possibility of its basic truths. He determined to sell *other* editors, to prove he was a writer, and not a favorite. His success is apparent. Most recent was his appearance in the new magazine, IF, with a very fine story indeed. And now, he returns to his favorite editor with a long novel which, sadly to many, isn't true—but it's a bit of writing he's proud of, and is the forerunner of even better fiction from his now facile typewriter.

# FRUSTRATED?

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